

MUSLIMAT AND NAHDLATUL ULAMA:
Negotiating Gender Relations
within a Traditional Muslim Organisation in Indonesia

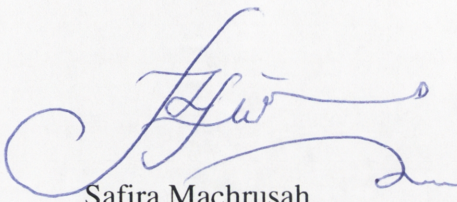
This sub-thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts in Asian Studies

Southeast Asia Centre
Faculty of Asian Studies
The Australian National University

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February 2005

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own research. Where I have drawn on the work of other scholars due acknowledgment has been made in the text.



Safira Machrusah

February 18, 2005

Acknowledgments

This thesis could not have been finished without the support of many people both in Australia, especially at the Australian National University, and in Indonesia. I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the following people.

I am deeply indebted to first and foremost, my supervisor, Dr. Kathryn Robinson for her advice, criticism, and understanding regarding my thesis and my writing. Her encouragement and faithful optimism regarding my skepticism about whether I could complete this thesis in such limited time made my work a little less daunting. Her sharp and enriching comments throughout my work and her friendship have been invaluable.

To Prof. Dr. Virginia Hooker and Prof. Dr. Barry Hooker, who inspired me and made me confident to dig into more valuable resources than I could find from my personal background as one of the members of the Nahdlatul Ulama family. Prof. Virginia Hooker entrusted me in her activities outside the ANU and encouraged me to better understand the portrait that I, as an Indonesian, had had of Australia and its multicultural society.

On a more personal level, I would like to thank and am particularly indebted to many people in Indonesia for giving countless hours of interviews and giving their kind attention to my work. *Ibu* Asmah Sjachruni, *Ibu* Umroh Machfudzoh Tolchah Mansur, *Ibu* Lathifah Hasyim, *Ibu* Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, *Ibu* Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid, *Mbak* Ermalena, *Mbak* Anisah Mahfudz, *Ibu* Khofifah Indar Parawansa, *Mbak* Zunatul Mafruchah, *Mbak* Ida Fauziyah, and my friend Ratu Dian Hatifah for patiently discussing with me about the future of women within Nahdlatul Ulama. I am deeply grateful to K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid who took time out of his busy schedule to discuss about Muslimat NU. Without the help from them, prominent members of the Nahdlatul Ulama family, my in-depth case study would not have been possible.

I am, without a doubt, indebted to the Australian Aid agency, that without its financial and institutional support, the entire process would not have started or finished. The more enriching knowledge I got from the university, the diverse views of my friends from different cultures, the intellectual debates among people

towards Asian and Asian values would have never happened without the opportunity given by AusAID to study here in Australia. My thanks to Deborah Reed, AusAID LO, for her understanding and kindness in enabling me to take a three and a half months absence from the ANU, and during a critical time, so as to take up the offer of a seat in the Indonesian Parliament.

I am deeply grateful for the unfailing emotional and loving support of my family especially my mother. Her encouragement and her belief that I would be able to follow the path of my father's career, her independency in all matters from the moment my father passed away in 1986, her success in bringing up all her children to achieve their own careers, have been a source of immense inspiration throughout my life. To you mother, and my father up there, this thesis will be dedicated.

My thanks, of course, are dedicated to my best friend, Umi Zahrok, who has supported me constantly both in my political career and in helping me gain my future by encouraging me to take on the challenging AusAID opportunity. I appreciate Don Wilkey for his help in the final stage of the writing process.

My personal thanks, however, is deserved for Muhammad Taufiq Prabowo, my everlasting husband. His words of cheer, humour and comfort during some difficult times, his offer a shoulder to cry on, his tremendous support in helping me finish my thesis, have been invaluable. Without him, writing this thesis would never have been possible. To him, I express my deepest love and admiration.

Above all, I thank Allah, who gave me a very invaluable opportunity and happiness in my life so I can walk through the path You provide, step by step. I feel very lucky that I can become what I have become today, I feel very lucky and also ashamed because You still gave me a chance to continue my career when all my brothers and sisters in Aceh passed away in the mounting tragedy caused by the Tsunami. To You they will return. I will never waste my time for anything useless. Never. I hope my life will now flourish, and be given especially to Indonesia, this time and in the future.

Abstract

This study explores how Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama, an autonomous body of a traditionalist Muslim organisation, negotiates its relations with its male-dominated parent organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, from the 1940s up to the period of political reform in order to reach more gender equal basis. The study argues that negotiations, which often enter the religious area where Islamic texts need to be reinterpreted, affect gender relations toward a more equal basis. However, the external factors (such as national politics) sometimes support the process of negotiations and in other times make gender relations go backward.

Prior to the independence of Indonesia, women of NU would like to organise themselves in a separate section. Based on a traditional interpretation of *kitab kuning*, NU was reluctant to grant women their request. The Japanese occupation (1942 – 1945) kept back early women's efforts since it made women more vulnerable. On the other hand, Muslim men gained advantage from the occupation. The end of the Japanese occupation made women of NU participate in the Indonesian struggle to gain its independence. Women's participation in the war impacted on the agreement of NU to form a special women's section called Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat in 1946.

The withdrawal of NU from the Masjumi Party in 1952 and its consequence (i.e. becoming an independent political party) marked a more advanced stage in gender relations between NU and Muslimat. NUM acceded to larger authorities, changed its name to Muslimat NU, and was enclosed in politics. Five women from Muslimat NU became members of the National Parliament in the 1955 general elections. The period of Guided Democracy (first half of 1960s) showed a close relationship between NU and Soekarno. Muslimat NU benefited as a consequence; two other women from Muslimat NU were appointed as members of the National Parliament.

However, the political pressure and the highly segregated gender roles imposed by the New Order had a negative impact on many aspects of gender relations. In addition, Muslimat NU also had to face the impact of NU's critical

stance to the regime. Muslimat NU focused, then, more on socioreligious activities and less on politics. This period marked also the absence of any member of Muslimat on the NU central board.

The fall of Soeharto in 1998 and the *reformasi* era which followed brought about several changes to Muslimat's and NU's relations. New and renewed discourses such as the quota system and the issue of polygamy are likely to allow new negotiations on gender relations. The state of how the discourses encouraged negotiating gender relations within NU is explored and asked to the interviewees. An analysis of strategies used in negotiating gender relations is presented in chapter six.

This study about negotiating gender relations between Muslimat and its parent organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, concludes that the reinterpretation of religious texts is only a part of the story in talking about better gender relations within traditional Muslims –and Islamic movements at large. The other part is whether external political forces support or in contrast hinder equal gender relations. Muslim women would gain equal gender relations if both factors, in fact, support the project.

Glossary and Abbreviation

Note: Arabic derived words are spelt according to widespread usage in Indonesia.

adalah justice.

adat customary law.

adil* or '*adala just, it refers especially to the emotional justice.

afifah keep in dignified manner.

ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* or *aswaja followers of the Prophet's tradition and the community, a term generally used by Sunni Muslims to distinguish themselves from the Shia Muslims and other Muslim minority groups. Traditionalist Muslims in Indonesia, however, often use the term to distinguish them from modernist Muslims.

Aisyyiah woman's wing of the reformist organisation Muhammadiyah, founded in 1917.

akhlaqul karimah good manners.

akil balig adult.

alam gaib supernatural.

al hukmu yaduru ma'a 'illatihi wujudan wa 'adaman regulation follows the reason behind its enactment (a principle of *fiqh*).

alim mastering several religious sciences and practising his knowledge, singular form of *ulama* in Arabic.

al-qudrah capacity.

amanah trusteeship.

amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (ordering good and prohibiting evil) an obligation for all Muslims and a frequently cited phrase in decision-making.

Ansor (supporters) young men's organisation within NU founded in 1934. At first, the name was used to refer to Muslim inhabitants of Medina after the Prophet moved in.

anti-KKN discourse anti corruption, collusion and nepotism floated in the *reformasi* era.

asas kekeluargaan the 'family principle'.

asas tunggal (sole foundation) New Order's program since 1980s of requiring social and religious organisations to adopt Pancasila as the sole ideological foundation.

aurat part of Muslims' (both men and women) body required by Islam to be covered.

a'wan non-core committee members of Syuriyah NU.

az-za'amah asy-syakhsiyah private leadership.

babat alas open the jungle.

bahtsul masail (discussing problems) since 1990s the term's long name is either *bahtsul masail ad-diniyah al-waqi'iyah* or *bahtsul masail ad-diniyah al-maudlu'iyah*.

bahtsul masail ad-diniyah al-maudlu'iyah (discussing religious thematic problems) regular collective discussion for delivering *fatwa* about several themes where each theme has been discussed more comprehensively in a (or several) seminar. This thematic discussion was a development of the previous *bahtsul masail*.

bahtsul masail ad-diniyah al-waqi'iyah (discussing factual religious problems) regular collective discussion for delivering *fatwa* based on questions posed by members (or branch) of NU. Thus, the NU's *fatwa* takes a form of response to the questions.

bait al-mal Muslim treasury.

berkah spiritual blessings, often associated to *kyai*'s power.

BKIA (Balai Kesehatan Ibu Anak) clinics for women and children.

BKKBN (Badan Koordinasi Keluarga Berencana Nasional) National Family Planning Coordination Agency.

BKKSP (Biro Konsultasi Keluarga Sakinah dan Poligami) Consulting Office on Harmonious Family and Polygamy.

BP4 (Badan Penasehat Perkawinan dan Penyelesaian Perceraian) Advisory Council for Marriage and Divorce Settlement.

BPUPKI (Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia), the committee to investigate preparations for Indonesian independence.

BVV (Beperkt Vergader Verbod), limited prohibition of meetings under the Dutch administration.

cancut tali wondo tightening the rope, initiating a protection for the whole family while in danger.

CETRO (Centre for Electoral Reform).

dapur umum public kitchens.

dar'ul mafasid aula min (muqaddamun 'ala) jalbi al-mashalih to prioritise avoiding the danger rather than pursuing the benefit (a principle of *fiqh*).

Dewan Syuro Religious Advisory Council of PKB chaired by K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid.

Dewan Tanfidz Executive Board of PKB.

Dharma Pertiwi armed forces wives' associations umbrella, established in 1964.

Dharma Wanita civil servants' wives' association, declared officially in 1974.

DIM (Daftar Isian Masalah) list of important matters, related to the discussion of a draft of law.

DPC (Dewan Pimpinan Cabang) District Party Board.

DPD (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah) Regional Representative Council.

DPR (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat) People's Representative Council – Indonesian national parliament.

DPDR (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah) Regional Parliament.

DPR-GR (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat-Gotong Royong) Gotong Royong (mutual cooperation) parliament, installed by Soekarno in 1960.

ewuh pakewuh a Javanese tradition regarding the proper manner towards senior or elder people.

fardlu 'ain individual or personal obligation.

Fatayat NU young women's organisation within NU founded in 1950.

fatwa non binding religious decision on Islamic law.

fiqh Islamic jurisprudence and law.

fitnah slander; trial; turbulence; with regard to women it means character associated with them inciting men's desire. In Indonesia, however, this word is mostly used to mean accusation.

FK3 (Forum Kajian Kitab Kuning) forum studying religious classical texts to examine gender-biased views chaired by Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid.

FKPPI (Forum Komunikasi Putra Puteri Purnawirawan ABRI), a forum gathering sons and daughters of retired armed services officers.

formatur usually refers to a team of limited people to set up members of a board or cabinet.

GBHN (Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara) broad guidelines on state policy.

Gerakan Jum'at Bersih (Clean Friday Movement) focusing on clean water sanitation and lavatories.

Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia) women's organisation affiliated to the PKI.

Gestapu (Gerakan September Tigapuluh), September 30 movement, often attributed to the PKI.

ghasab arrogation of another's property or right.

Golkar (Golongan Karya) Functional Groups, the ruling party during the New Order era. It was used by Soeharto as his vehicle to extend his power.

golput (golongan putih), white group who do not vote in the general elections.

GOW (Gabungan Organisasi Wanita) Association of Women's Organizations.

gus or *bagus* son of *kyai*.

hadits traditions or reports of the Prophet's sayings and deeds.

halal permitted by the religion.

halaqoh study circle, discussion group, seminar.

haram prohibited by the religion.

harkat dignity.

Hizbullah (God's party) Muslim militia (mostly young people) commanded by Zainul Arifin during military clashes between the Dutch administration and Indonesian people after Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945.

Hizbut Tahrir (HT) Freedom Party, a movement connected to the Middle East (Lebanon) calling for the restoration of *khalifah* (Caliph) system.

hurriyah freedom.

IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri) State Institute for Islamic Studies.

ibadah worship, ritual.

ibu sejati truly mother.

idza ta'aradla mafsadatani ra'iya a'dhamuha dliwaran bi al-irtikabi akhaffihima to consider the less dangerous of two things (a principle of *fiqh*).

ijtihad reasoning, interpretation. In Islamic jurisprudence, it refers to individual (or collective) interpretation of the law rather than following the earlier scholars' views (*taklid*).

ilmu laduni special knowledge from the God.

imam prayer's leader.

IPKI (Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia) League of Upholders of Indonesian Independence.

IPNU (Ikatan Pelajar NU) male student organisation within NU founded in 1954. During the New Order it changed to Ikatan Putra NU or Boys of NU following the ban of any student organisation in *madrasah* and public schools.

IPPNU (Ikatan Pelajar Putri NU) or previously IPNU-Puteri, female student organisation within NU founded in 1955. During the New Order it changed to Ikatan Putri-Putri NU or Girls of NU.

istighotsah mass gathering for praying.

jaiz permitted acts by the religion.

jama'ah group, usually used for praying in group.

jihad (to strive) can be used in a spiritual sense or a physical struggle or Holy war.

jimat amulets.

K.H. abbreviation of *Kyai Haji*, a 'title' for religious scholars having conducted pilgrimage to Mecca.

kampung residential area often occupied by the middle-lower class; village.

kaum adat traditional group who hold customary law.

kaum bapa men's, husbands' or fathers' group.

kaum ibu women's, wives' or mothers' group.

kaum muda (young group) it refers to modernist Muslims.

kaum santri (*santri* group) it refers to traditionalist Muslims or pious Muslims.

kaum tua or kaum tuha (older group) it refers to traditionalist Muslims.

kebohongan publik make a lie to the public.

kenduri meal of religious character.

khalifah the Caliph; or the system of government.

Khittah 1926 (Charter of 1926) reform programme based on the principles set up by NU's founders in 1926.

kitab kuning or kitab classical texts on Islamic sciences.

KNIP (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat) Indonesian National Central Committee, provisional national parliament after the 1945 proclamation of independence.

KNPI (Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia) Indonesian Youth National Committee.

kodrat biological determinations, one's inherent nature.

Konsepsi idea proposed by Soekarno in 1956 which would comprise all functional groups in the society and embrace all ideological leanings in politics.

Konstituante Constituent Assembly, elected in 1955 to prepare the Indonesian Constitution, dissolved by Soekarno in 1959 before finishing its job.

kopiyah Muslim hat.

Kowani (Kongres Wanita Indonesia) Indonesia Women's Congress, federation of women's organisations.

KPI (Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia) Indonesian Women's Coalition.

KPPI (Kaukus Perempuan Parlemen Indonesia) Caucus of Indonesian Women Parliamentarians, a caucus gathering cross parties female members of the national parliament founded in 2001.

kyai khos special *kyais* because of their believed blessings.

kyai male religious leader or scholar often he owns a *pesantren*.

kyai perempuan female religious leader or scholar within *pesantren*, to differentiate her from *nyai* (wife of *kyai*).

LAPUNU (Lajnah Pemilihan Umum Nahdlatul Ulama) special committee of NU to prepare NU for the elections.

LKBN (Lembaga Keluarga Berencana Nasional or National Family Planning Institution, the institution which was established prior to the establishment of BKKBN).

LKKNU (Lembaga Kemaslahatan Keluarga NU) Family Welfare Institution of Nahdlatul Ulama.

LKP2 (Lembaga Konsultasi dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan) Institute for Women's Consultation and Empowerment, an organ of Fatayat NU providing advocacy and support for the victims of domestic violence.

ma'ruf just doings, good deeds.

madrasah banat religious school for girls.

madrasah Islamic school having graded classes.

madzab Islamic school of law. There are four popular *madzab* in Sunni Muslim: Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi'i, and Hanbali. However, Syafi'i's *madzab* is largely followed in Indonesia.

Majelis Syuro Religious Advisory Council.

majlis taklim religious study group, Arabic term for *pengajian*.

mandi wajib obligatory shower.

manfa'at benefit.

martabat status, social or religious.

masjid wanita women's mosque initiated by Aisyiyah.

Masjumi (Madjelis Sjuro Muslimin Indonesia) Religious Council of Indonesian Muslims, federation of different Muslim organisations which became the name of political party in 1946 and banned by Soekarno in 1960, from which NU withdrew in 1952.

materiil- spiritual a fraction in the House of Representatives which emphasised on the physical development; Nationalist and Christian parties' fraction.

memangku to hold a person on your lap.

mengambil hati to win someone's heart.

MIAI (Majlisul Islamil A'laa Indonesia) Supreme Islamic Council, federation of Islamic organisations founded in 1937.

mitra sejajar gender equity.

MPR[S] (Majlis Permusyawaratan Rakyat [Sementara]) People's Consultative Assembly [Provisional], National Assembly which sets broad policy of the State, previously elected the president and the vice president.

mudharat problems or danger.

Muhammadiyah a Muslim reformists' movement founded in 1912. Its main concerns are education and religious proselytizing.

mukhlis a very sincere person to Allah.

muktamar national congress involving all branches held previously every year but now every five years. It elects new central board leaders and delivers recommendations and *fatwa*.

munkar unlawful things

muqarrar prime reference of classical texts in *pesantren*.

murahiq adolescence.

musawah equality.

Muslimat NU women's organisation within NU founded in 1946.

musyawarah luar biasa extraordinary congress.

musyawarah nasional alim ulama national meeting held by Syuriah NU where *ulama* from *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* are invited. It is often held at the same time of *konferensi besar* and functions to deliver *fatwa*.

Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Religious Scholars) a traditionalist Muslim organisation founded in 1926.

nahdliyat female members of NU.

nahdliyin or **warga nahdliyin** members of NU both men and women.

nahwu Arabic syntax.

Nasakom (Nasionalis, Agama dan Komunis) nationalist, religious, and communist ideology promoted by Soekarno, previously called *Konsepsi*.

nidzam system.

ning daughter of *kyai*.

non-kodrati antonym of *kodrati*, often associated to the public roles of women.

NU see Nahdlatul Ulama.

nyai wife of *kyai*; female religious scholar.

P2WKSS (Progran Peningkatan Peran Perempuan dan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) Teams for Uplifting the Status of Women Through Healthy and Prosperous Family.

pamrih rewards.

PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional) National Mandate Party, headed by Amien Rais, a Muhammadiyah leader.

Pancasila Five Principles of State Philosophy.

pansus (*panitia khusus*) special committee formed by the parliament particularly for discussing a draft of bill.

panti asuhan orphanage houses.

PBNU (Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama) NU central board.

pendamping suami standing at the side of their husband, ideology of the New Order about women particularly at the beginning of its regime.

pengabdian devotion.

pengajian akbar mass religious meeting.

Pengajian Al-Hidayah religious wing of Golkar chaired by Aisyah Hamid Baidlawi in 2004.

pengajian religious study group.

peran ganda dual role of women.

Peraturan Khusus special regulations.

peristiwa Gestapu Gestapu event (see Gestapu).

perkakas yang ampuh invulnerable instruments.

Permesta (Persatuan Rakyat Semesta) Union of All People, a secessionist group during Soekarno's regime.

Persis (Persatuan Islam) United Islam, a radical reformist Muslim organisation established in the early 1920s.

pesantren Islamic traditional boarding school.

pesantren putri Islamic boarding school for girls.

pintu darurat emergency door.

PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa) National Awakening Party, a party founded by NU's leaders in 1998.

PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) Indonesian Communist Party.

PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) Family Welfare Tutorship, changed to (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) Empowerment for Family Welfare.

PMII (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia) Indonesian Muslim Student's Movement, NU's tertiary students' organisation, founded in 1960.

pondok boarding house.

PP (Peraturan Pemerintah) Government Regulation.

PPKB (Pergerakan Perempuan Kebangkitan Bangsa) women's wing of National Awakening Party.

PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan) United Development Party, a 'fusion' of several Islamic parties (NU, MI, Perti and PSII) formed in 1973 as a result of the New Order's policy to reduce the number of political parties in Indonesia.

PRRI (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia) Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia, regional government installed in West Sumatra in 1957.

PSII (Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia) Indonesian Islamic Union Party.

PSW (Pusat Studi Wanita) Center for Women Studies.

PUAN Amal Hayati (Pesantren Untuk Pemberdayaan Perempuan) Islamic boarding school for women's empowerment – Hope of my life, an institute founded by Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid advocating gender equality.

qadla judging, delivering verdicts.

qasatha just, it refers especially to the material aspect of justice.

rais akbar (great chairperson) head of Syuriyah NU's central board, only used by K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari.

rais am (general chairperson) head of Syuriyah NU's central board.

reformasi reform, it often refers to the period after the fall of Soeharto in 1998.

Sabilillah (God's way) Muslim militia (including *kyai* and older people) commanded by K.H. Masykur during military clashes between the Dutch administration and Indonesian people after Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945.

santri students of *pesantren*; devout Muslim.

selamatan meal of religious character, particularly practiced in Java.

shalihah pious women.

sharf Arabic morphology.

SPII (Sarekat Perempuan Islam Indonesia) Association of Indonesian Muslim Women, affiliated to Sarekat Islam.

spiritual-materiil a fraction in the House of Representatives which emphasised on the religious development, Muslim political parties' fraction.

suci pure.

sunnah precedent set by the Prophet Muhammad for believers to follow as recorded in the Quran and *hadits*.

syariah the law of Islam.

Syuriyah Supreme Religious Council of NU, usually comprising *ulama*.

tabir curtain separating men and women in mixed gatherings.

tafsir exegesis of the Quran.

takzim holding someone in high esteem.

Tanfidziyah Executive Board of NU.

taqlid following. In Islamic jurisprudence, it refers to practising the earlier scholars' views.

tarikh history. In *pesantren* it refers particularly to the biography of the Prophet

tasawuf Sufism.

tasbih rosary.

tasharruf al-imam ‘ala al-ra’iyah manuthun bil al maslahah leader’s rule according people’s best interests (a principle of *fiqh*).

tauhid Islamic theology which stresses on the unity of the God.

tidak ikhlas insincerity, do not surrender.

tidak tega do not have the nerve.

tim mantap a PKB’s team to draw up the party selection.

tim perumus the formulators.

TPQ (Taman Pendidikan Al-Quran) Quranic school for children.

tsubutu amrin li amrin making laws.

ulama madzhab religious scholar founder of a school of thought in Islamic jurisprudence.

ulama perempuan female religious scholar(s) or leader(s).

ulama religious scholar(s) or leader(s).

umat or ***ummah*** Muslim community or society.

Utusan Daerah Regional Representative.

wacana discourse.

wajib ‘ain individual religious obligation.

Wanita Persatuan Women of the United Party, women’s wing of PPP.

YKM (Yayasan Kesejahteraan Muslimat) a foundation under Muslimat NU’s central board which is concerned with women’s welfare.

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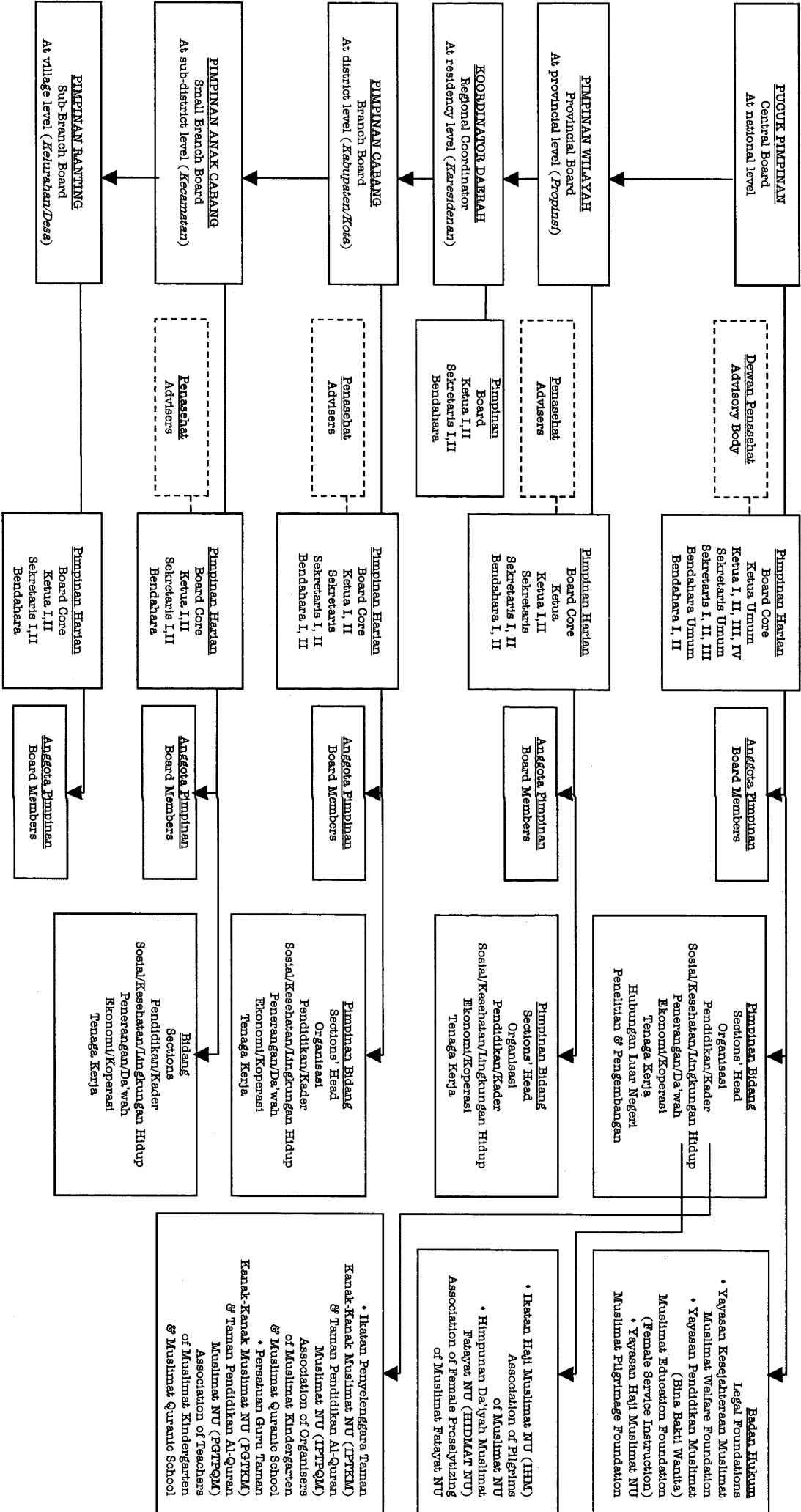
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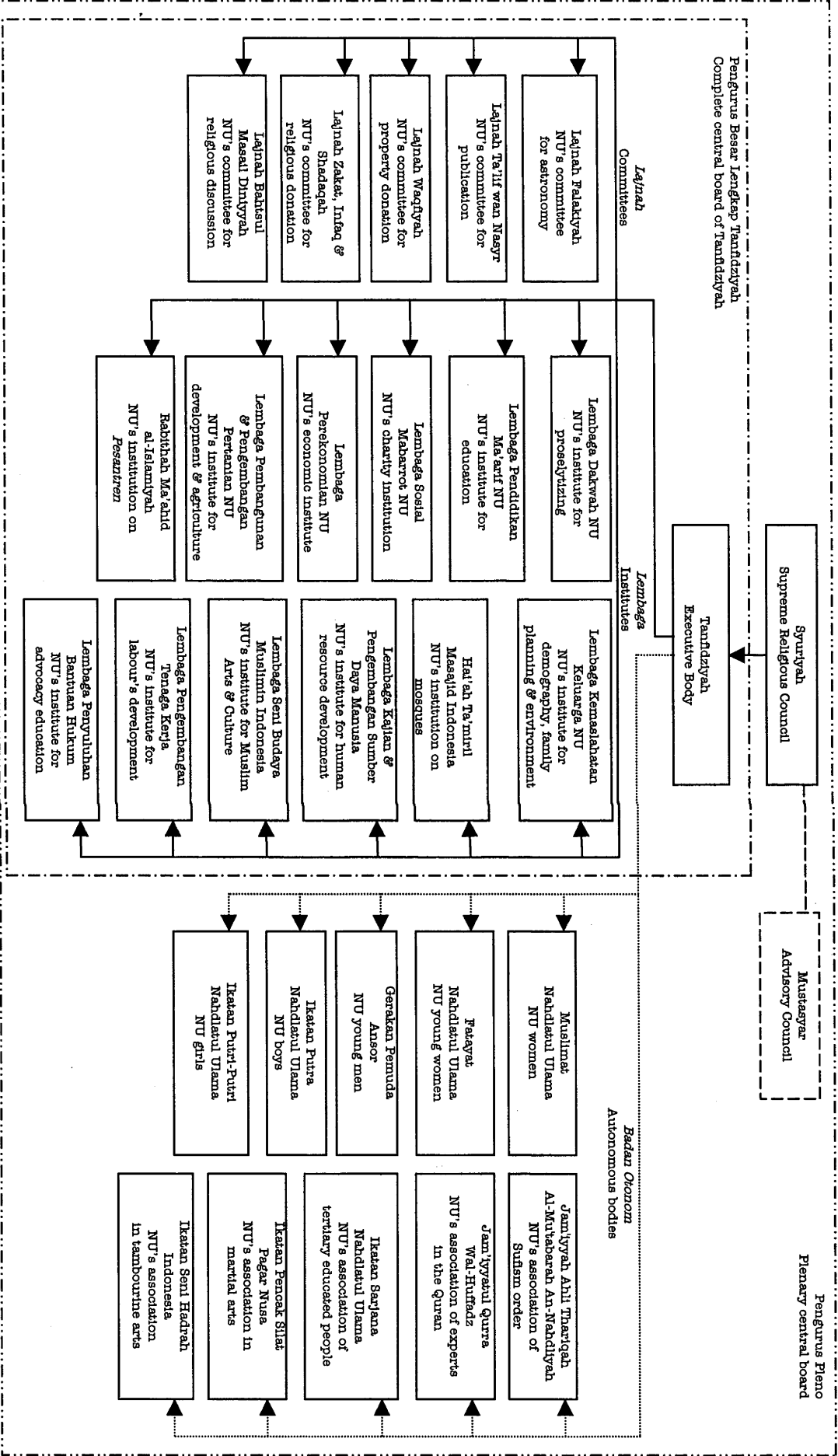
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Diagram 1: Structure of Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama



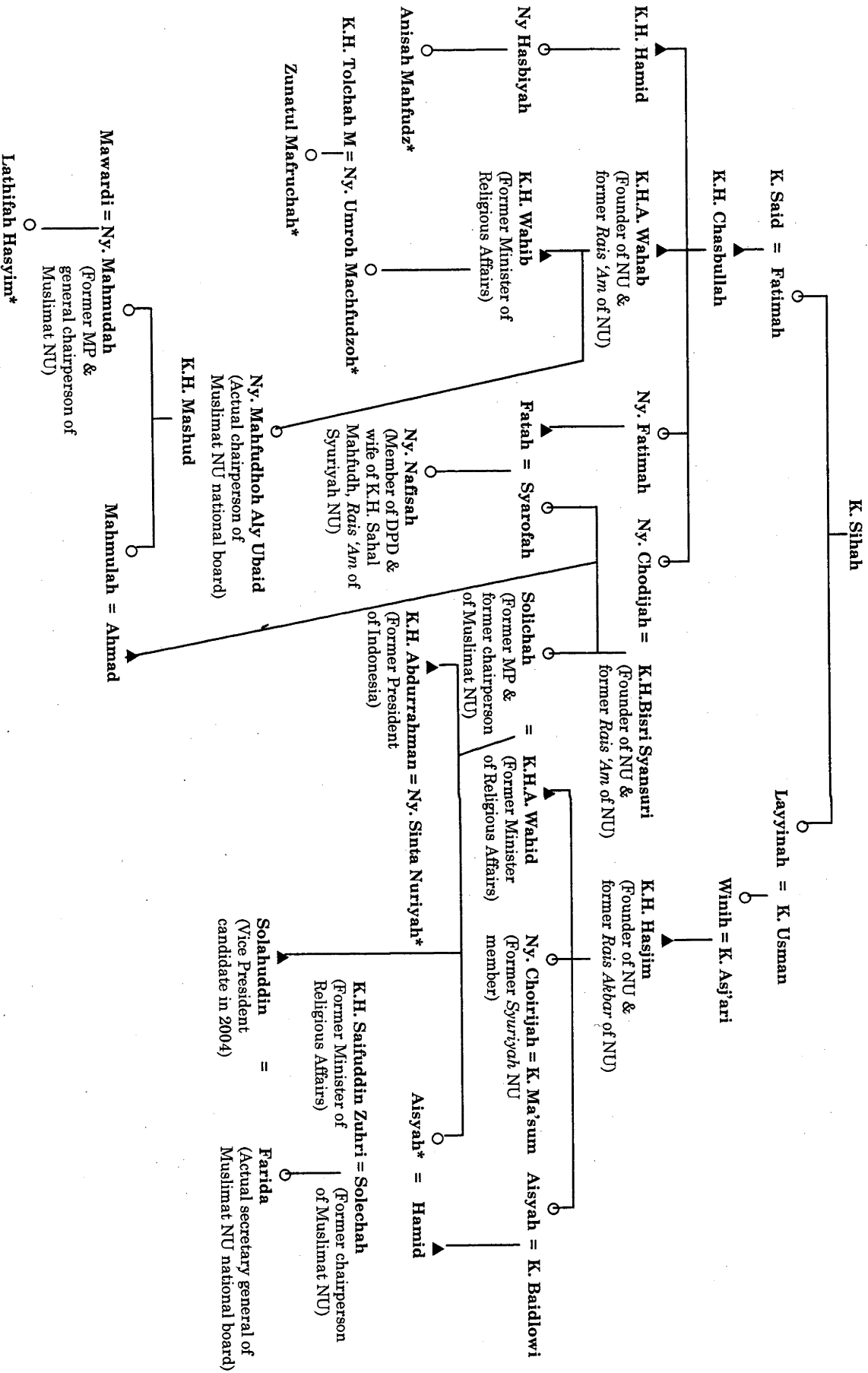
Note: (Source: PP Muslimat NU, 1996) Ketua Umum (General Chairperson); Ketua (Chairperson); Sekretaris Umum (Secretary-General); Sekretaris (Secretary); Bendahara Umum (General Treasurer); Bendahara (Treasurer); Organisasi (Organization); Pendidikan/Kader (Education/Cadre); Sosial/Kesehatan/Lingkungan Hidup (Social Affairs/Health/Environment); Penerangan/Da'wah (Information/Proselytizing); Ekonomi/Koperasi (Economy/Cooperative); Tenaga Kerja (Labor); Hubungan Luar Negeri (Overseas Relation); Penelitian & Pengembangan (Research & Development)

Diagram 2: Organisational Structure of Nahdlatul Ulama



Notes: (Source: Sekretariat PBNU, 1985)
Committees: for programs which need a special form of handling; Institutes: sections of NU, executing its programs; Autonomous bodies: for specific groups; Independent by laws except *agidha* (faith), *azas* (principles) & aims match to NU, report to NU the results of general assembly and NU has the right to intervene.

Diagram 3: Genealogy of Muslimat NU Leaders



Note: (Source: Interview with Umroh Machfudzoh)
 * : interviewees of this study; = : married with; ▲ : son of; ○ : daughter of; Ny. : Nyai (Female religious leader)

Chapter one: Introduction

Scope of this study

Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (or Muslimat NU or Muslimat¹) is one of the largest women's organisations in Indonesia. The organisation maintains that its grass roots members number about 12 million Muslim women (Media Indonesia, 2004). In 2000, Muslimat NU had 26 provincial boards, 326 district boards, 2,650 sub-district boards, and thousands of village boards throughout Indonesia (see Diagram 1 for the Structure of Muslimat NU). It had organised during the year more than 26,000 *majlis taklim* (religious study groups) at village level. It was operating more than 6,000 kindergartens and 2,500 TPQ or Quranic schools for children aged between 5 and 12 years old. It managed 53 clinics and hospitals, 35 homes for aged people, and 10 dormitories for young women (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:20a).

Historically, Muslimat was a section of Nahdlatul Ulama (or NU), the parent organisation. In 1946 Muslimat NU became an autonomous body. However, its ties with NU have remained strong. For instance, people often call members of NU (including men and women) *nahdliyin* or *warga nahdliyin* (both mean members of NU). In addition, some people (see among others Romahurmuziy, Cahyono & Machrusah, 2000:11) use a more explicit term *nahdliyat* (meaning female members of NU) referring specifically to female members of NU though structurally speaking they are members of Muslimat NU or one of the other women's organisations affiliated with NU. Along with this use

¹ Muslimat as a name was also used by the Masjumi Party for its women's wing. However, since this party was banned by President Soekarno in 1960 its women's wing disappeared as well. Today the name Muslimat almost always refers to Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama. In this thesis Muslimat without additional reference is meant to refer to Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama.

of terms, estimated counts of NU members often include women. For example, 35 million members of NU estimated by Barton & Fealy (1996:xix) that made NU the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, included female members as indicated in their comment that “(f)our years later, a separate women’s division, Muslimat NU, was formally established”. Interestingly, referring to the index, Muslimat NU is only mentioned twice. Yet, one of the two instances, it is used as an adjective for a man (Barton & Fealy, 1996:263)².

Such examples support, thus, the argument that women are often included and yet not consulted in decision-making. Moreover, women often have to suffer the consequences of men’s decisions. This unequal status motivated Muslimat NU’s leaders to negotiate better gender relations. For instance, Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi during my interview said,

In fact, what I insisted was that Muslimat must have a seat in Tanfidziyah (i.e. executive board of NU). Why? Because I think that the number of women within NU is large, but they cannot express their voice. Decisions taken by NU also impact on women but Muslimat was not invited to discuss these issues.

This study seeks to investigate how gender relations are negotiated between Muslimat and Nahdlatul Ulama. It tries to explore through a historical perspective how gender issues develop among Muslimat and NU, how Muslimat NU internally reviews traditional Muslim perceptions on women and negotiates new perceptions within NU, and how external factors such as political situations impact on negotiating gender relations. In this study I argue that traditional Muslim women (or Muslim women in short) could gain significant advances towards equal gender relations if both internal ‘religious’ negotiations as well as external political circumstances support the project.

² It refers to Chalid Mawardi, son of a former general chairperson of Muslimat NU. In addition, the book says that the formal establishment of Muslimat was in 1938 as “In 1934, a youth wing was founded under the name Ansor. Four years later, a separate women section was formally established, ...” (Barton & Fealy, 1996:xix) indicates which is incorrect according to Muslimat NU’s sources.

Methodology

This study covers gender relationships between Muslimat and Nahdlatul Ulama viewed from a historical perspective. However, I outline first the difficulties faced in this study about Muslimat NU. There were two major problems: the lack of previous studies about Muslim women's movements in Indonesia including Muslimat NU; and the lack of first hand data. As Blackburn (2004) argues that not enough research has been done on what women do to influence political Islam from within. Robinson (2004:184) states a similar view,

But Islam is generally absent not only from these Indonesian accounts of "the position of women". The standard English-language reviews of "the position of women" in Indonesia ... rarely mention Islam as a factor influencing women's social position.

The lack of written data appeared also to be a great obstacle. The oral tradition that prevails within Muslimat NU may be a reason for this lack. As stated by Khofifah Indar Parawansa (interview) "We are not yet a reading society. And we are very far from a writing society". In addition, some particular circumstances have also worsened the situation. Regarding collecting historical data about Muslimat NU from its office, I experienced something I had not expected. During the rebuilding of NU's office at Jalan Kramat Raya, Jakarta where the previous office of Muslimat NU was housed, Muslimat NU had to be rehoused into temporary offices in Jalan Amir Hamzah, and then to Tebet, while it built a new separate office at Jalan Pengadegan. These relocations impacted on the loss of much archival material of Muslimat NU. When I came to the new office of Muslimat NU, a member of staff told me that Muslimat NU had lost much of its archives while moving from the Kramat Raya office. The very few books that I refer to in this thesis are those that have survived (i.e. the unpublished materials, the archives were lost).

Since very little data were available, I have had to be more reliant on interviews. Collecting information through interviews was a useful approach to explore issues not discussed in the publications. In addition, it deepened

investigation of ideas. I found that interviewing women politicians of NU, an important primary source for this study, offered a key to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the internal dynamics of Muslimat NU's gender related stories. The interviews allowed me to canvass a number of points of view concerning the history of Muslimat NU and its relationship with its parent organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama.

Method of data collection

This study is based on two types of data. First, I used written sources including documents and books produced by Muslimat NU's central board which are not available outside Muslimat NU. I also made use of newspapers and magazines from local or foreign sources which I accessed through their websites. I referred furthermore to secondary sources on the history of NU and on Islam in Indonesia in order to have the big picture.

Secondly, I collected information by interviewing a sample of prominent members of Muslimat NU at the national level. I principally chose women who were politically active, and most of them were members of political parties who also had experience as leaders of Muslimat NU at national or provincial levels. Some of them had been associated with prominent male members of NU, whether they were the daughter or wife of male leaders of NU (see Diagram 3 for the Genealogy of Muslimat NU Leaders). The interviews were conducted in Jakarta between Mid February 2004 and Mid March 2004. However, I followed up the interviews with some respondents by phone in December 2004.

Sample

The criteria I used in choosing the sample of interviewees were that they (i) were members of Muslimat NU; (ii) either participated in party politics or were members of Muslimat NU's central board; and (iii) represented different generations of Muslimat NU. I wanted to explore their aspirations and their awareness of different aspects of women's roles, how they articulated their

aspirations while participating in politics, and how they negotiated their relations with NU (that is with male members).

The choice of central board members was based on their representativeness of Muslimat NU. The structural model of Muslimat NU's organisation means that policies and activities of the central board will usually be followed by Muslimat NU boards at lower levels. The respondents' participation in politics³ was also an important variable for the purposes of this study since it revealed the avant-garde struggle of negotiating gender relations.

I conducted all the interviews in a one-on-one situation. I used an interview guide to make sure that the same questions were asked of each respondent. Sometimes the interviews were accompanied by more informal discussions. I was interested to elicit free-ranging responses which revealed respondents' ideas and perceptions. I listened to them while the conversation was being recorded. I prompted respondents to expand their story if it broadened the picture. Sometimes I followed up the interviews with phone calls which were also recorded. I always informed my respondents prior to the interview that the information given would be presented in my thesis and any published work that resulted.

Characteristics of the sample

Due to their busy schedules, some of the chosen respondents could not be interviewed. Of the sixteen women selected only eleven fulfilled the criteria and were also available for interview. These eleven women had the following characteristics:

Age: interviewees' age ranged between 35 and 74 and the mean was 51.5 years old (see Chart 1 below).

³ It is interesting that most women from an NU background who participated in politics, whether they joined PPP, Golkar or PKB, came from Muslimat NU or were recruited as members of Muslimat NU after they became members of parliament.

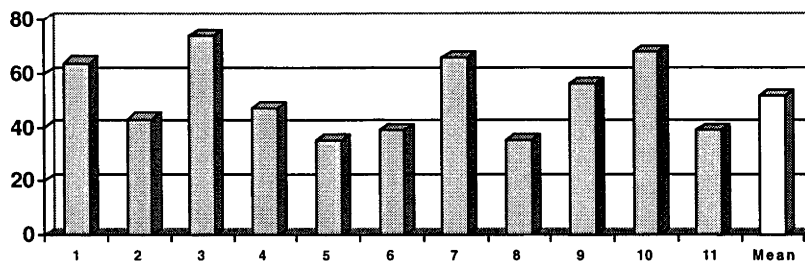


Chart 1: Age of the interviewees

Education: most of respondents were tertiary educated women. Among them, one graduated from a Master’s program and three were preparing for (or had postponed) a Master’s program. Two others had finished a secondary education. The average number of years in education was 15.3. Some of the interviewees had completed their education while working early on in their career (see Chart 2 below)

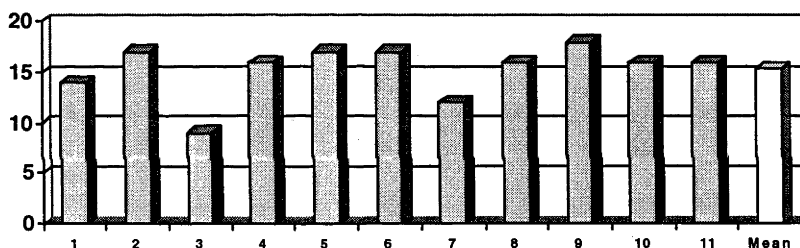


Chart 2: Years of education of the interviewees

Occupation: seven of them were members or former members of parliament (among whom one was a former Minister for Women’s Empowerment). Four others were women activists (among whom two were candidates for MPs who had contested a seat in the legislature in the 2004 general elections).

Negotiating gender relations within traditional Muslims in Indonesia: key issues

This section reviews some of the issues raised in the studies of gender roles and how they are perceived within traditional Muslim society.

Traditional Muslims in Indonesia

In societies where religion plays an important role in public life, as in Indonesia where more than 85 per cent of the population are Muslims, religious organisations can be powerful factors in determining values especially for their followers. As mentioned by Benda (1985:23) in his preface,

Though Islam in the other areas has undeniably played – and continues to play – a leading role in the political evolution of Indonesia, it is on Java that it has found its most important organisational expression. It is there, also, that Islamic groups have been most directly involved in the shaping of Indonesian politics in general.

Benda (1985:33) further notes “The history of Indonesian Islam is the history of this expanding *santri* civilization and its impact upon the religious, social and political life of Indonesia”. Originally, *santri* refers to the people around the traditional Indonesian *pesantren* or religious boarding school headed by *kyai* or *ulama* (both words mean Muslim scholars or leaders, while *kyai* is a Javanese word, *ulama* is a loanword from Arabic).

The best example of *santri* organisations is Nahdlatul Ulama. Currently, official estimation of the number of NU members is about 35 million (Marzu, 2004). Members of this organisation are often referred to as *kaum santri dan ulama* (*santri* and *ulama* group) and largely live in rural areas. The organisation was founded in 1926 by several eminent *ulama*, all were leaders of *pesantren* such as K.H. Hasjim Asj’ari, K.H. Wahab Chasbullah, K.H. Bisri Syansuri all from Jombang, East Java, and K.H. Ridwan from Surabaya. It was founded in response to the debate after the fall of the Ottoman empire and the abolition of *khalifah* (the Caliph) which was considered as representing the Muslim world. In addition there were rumours about the abolition of traditional practices in Mecca which were also practiced by people around *pesantren*. This organisation wanted the Caliph to be restored and that the traditional practices should be maintained (cf. Barton & Fealy, 1996:xix; Noer, 1973:222-231).

NU strictly bases its teachings on the classical texts written by some pious *ulama* who referred to the scholars of the first centuries after the Prophet Muhammad's death. Several of those *ulama* are known as the founders of *madzhab* (school of thought in Islamic jurisprudence). Four *madzhab* still have influence until today and are followed by Muslims worldwide. They are Madzhab Hanafi founded by Abu Hanifah and followed largely in South Asia; Madzhab Maliki founded by Malik and followed largely in Africa; Madzhab Syafi'i founded by Syafi'i and followed largely in Southeast Asia and several Arabic countries; and Madzhab Hanbali founded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal and followed largely in Saudi Arabia. Such prominence has attached to the *ulama madzhab* (founders of *madzhab*) because of their important role they played in the absence of the authority of the Prophet (Noer, 1973:9). People followed these *ulama* as new needs and problems arose. During the life of the Prophet, people asked important questions of him. His statements and decisions as well as those of the Quran were followed obediently. The Prophet also settled differences among members of the community. After his death those functions were, thus, fulfilled by the *ulama* and the caliphs. However, the absence of such authority of the Prophet opened ways to different opinions or even contradictory ones.

NU is the leading organisation in Indonesia which emphasizes the practice of *madzhab* and it also makes an effort to guard this practice. Although NU acknowledges all four *madzhab* in its by-laws, in fact, NU stresses upon its followers to practice Madzhab Syafi'i (Noer, 1973:224). The attitude to strictly follow the orthodox *madzhab* and to avoid one's own personal perceptions of the two divine sources of Islam (i.e. the Quran and the *hadits* or the Prophet's traditions) is motivated by the reason that contemporary people are unable to reach the true meanings of those sources. This attitude is called *taqlid* (following) whereas the direct interpretation of both sources is called *ijtihad* (reasoning). Those two procedures of using the divine texts are largely followed in delivering *fatwa* (non binding religious decision on Islamic law) (Machrusah, 2002). The *ijtihad* was used by modern Egyptian scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha, whose influence impacted on the emergence of modern Islam in Indonesia. Through these different procedures, thus, the terms *kaum tua* (older

group) and *kaum muda* (young group) were introduced in Indonesia. In this regard, Nahdlatul Ulama was considered as the *kaum tua* or traditional Muslims and Muhammadiyah⁴ as the *kaum muda* or modern Muslims. However, NU often considers itself *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* (abbreviated to *aswaja* literally meaning followers of the Prophet's tradition and the community) to differentiate it from modernist Islamist movements.

The views of NU on social relationships as well as on religious worships are based on the classical texts which are called *kitab kuning* (yellow books). The naming of *kitab kuning* is related to the physical appearance since many *kitab kuning* were printed on yellow paper of lower quality (Yafie, 1989:3). *Kitab kuning* cover Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tasawuf* (Sufism), *tafsir* (exegesis), *hadits* (traditions of the Prophet), *tauhid* (Islamic theology), *tarikh* (history), Arabic language particularly grammar (*nahwu* or syntax and *sharf* or morphology) and others (Dhofier, 1982:50; Yafie, 1989:4-5). On the importance of *kitab kuning* for traditional Muslims, Azhari (1989:2) maintains that they are “the system of values held and influencing all aspects of life. They measure people's knowledge as well as their piety”. He goes on to argue that the teachings of *kitab kuning* are implemented by people around *pesantren* in their ritual practices, social relations, ethics and way of life (Azhari, 1989:2).

In Indonesia, especially in Java, *kitab kuning* are taught by *kyais* (male religious leaders). A *kyai* generally owns and directs a *pesantren* where he gives religious instruction. A *kyai* is often regarded as a charismatic leader because – among other factors– he masters many *kitab kuning* in different religious sciences and implements their teachings in his daily activities or when delivering his *fatwa*. Nasuha maintains that *kyai* cannot be separated from *kitab kuning* since “(k)itab kuning is the codification of Islamic teachings' values whereas *kyai* is the

⁴ Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 as a Muslim reformists' movement in Yogyakarta. Its main concerns are education and religious proselytizing. An internal estimation maintains that currently, Muhammadiyah members amount to 15 million people (Fanani, 2004). Meanwhile some people estimate the number of Muhammadiyah members to reach 29 million people (Leirvik, 2002). Politically, since *reformasi* most Muhammadiyah members have given their vote to PAN (National Mandate Party) although some members are affiliated with PPP (United Development Party) and Golkar.

personification of those values” (1989:19). Such *kyais* become the *ummah*’s (Muslim community) guides, not only for *kaum santri* (literally students of *pesantren*) but also for the society at large. There is a term often used to describe this quality of *kyai* and that is *alim* (mastering several religious sciences and practising his knowledge, singular form of *ulama* in Arabic). However, *kyais* are very unlikely to master all of the diverse sciences of *kitab kuning*. Most are known and are well respected experts in particular classical texts (Bruinessen, 1995:19).

Another important attribute of a *kyai* which adds to his charisma is his spiritual power. People often believe that *kyais* possess the ability to give *berkah* (blessing) because of a connection to *alam gaib* (the supernatural) (Bruinessen, 1995:19). Dhofier (1982:56) suggests that with his religious knowledge, a *kyai* is someone who knows the God and the secrets of the universe and thus holds a very high position. Lately, some *kyais* were attributed the title of *kyai khos* or special *kyais* because of their believed blessings. People’s beliefs in the charisma of *kyai* even extend to the family of *kyai*. Children of *kyai* are believed to have *ilmu laduni* (special knowledge from the God) (Dhofier, 1982:69).

Furthermore, Dhofier emphasizes the importance of alliances by marriage between the families of *kyai*. These alliances on the one hand assure the continuity of *pesantren* (1982:62) and on the other hand elevate the social status of all members of the families including their relatives (1982:69). Within this tradition a wife of a *kyai* receives a special title of *nyai*, his son is given the title of *gus*, from *bagus* meaning handsome, and his daughter the title of *ning*. Since the 1970s, however, *nyai* can also mean a female scholar who may own and directs a *pesantren* and not only a wife of a *kyai* (Faiqoh, 2003:32). In order to distinguish the two meanings, therefore, some people prefer to use the term *kyai perempuan* (female *kyai*) instead of *nyai* to refer to a female religious scholar. Another common variation for the female religious scholar is *ulama perempuan* (female religious scholar) (cf. Mar’iyah, 2002).

Another important element within the *pesantren* tradition is *santri*. This term originally meant a student or a body of students who lived in a *pesantren*. However, the meaning of *santri* has broadened to include all practising Muslims

living, especially in the neighbourhood of the *pesantren*. All practising people who have received some of their religious instruction from *kyai* are considered as *santri*. The *santri* plays an important role in promoting traditional Islam throughout Indonesia and in advancing the influence of *kyai*. Some *santri* graduate to become *kyai* in their respective villages and further transmit the religious teachings of their 'former' *kyai*⁵. Large *pesantren* such as Tebuireng in Jombang receives *santri* from far off regions or even from outside of Java (Dhofier, 1982:111), so the influence of *kyai* and traditional Islam reaches those regions also.

The attitude of *santri* is usually developed in the daily lessons given by the *kyai* during their education in the *pesantren*. The *kyai* usually sets out certain rules for *santri* prior to further learning of *kitab kuning*. "Respectful attitude, *takzim* (holding someone in high esteem) and absolute obedience to the *kyai* are among the first values taught for *santri*" (Bruinessen, 1995:18). Though some rules, particularly with regard to total obedience, have changed through this doctrine, *santri* become very faithful in practising the traditional Islamic values as well as following the *kyai*'s commands.

These four elements of *kyai*, *santri*, *pesantren* and *kitab kuning* are the important factors of Nahdlatul Ulama in disseminating the traditional Islam throughout the society. As the *kitab kuning* is taught by *kyai* and delivered through his *fatwa* and then distributed by his *santri*, most Islamic teachings inside those *kitab kuning* are then accepted as the single authoritative source for the society. Even though *fatwa* delivered by *kyai* are often considered 'rigid' since most of the arguments are based on earlier interpretations, the implementation of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh*, however, is different. "Practice is usually more moderate than the Islamic jurisprudence found in the books ... In addition, rules which degrade women are rarely practiced" (Bruinessen, 1995:175)

⁵ Within the tradition of *pesantren*, a person would not say my 'former' *kyai* or teachers because they consider them as his or her 'religious fathers'. He or she always thinks about them as his or her '*kyai*' or 'teachers' in short and respects them devoutly, even though he himself becomes a well known *kyai* (Dhofier, 1982:82).

Gender relations within traditional Muslims' references

Kitab kuning which is taught in *pesantren* talks also about relations between men and women. However, as Bruinessen states, discourses in *kitab kuning* about gender relations are predominantly male-biased (1995:172). He goes on to say that in those *kitab kuning*, men are usually considered as the standard for everything and the difference between men and women causes women a *martabat* (status) less than that of men (1995:172).

Muhammad bin Umar Nawawi Al –Bantani Al-Jawy or well known as Syeikh Nawawi was one of the writers of a popular *kitab kuning* regarding relations between men and women, '*Uqud Al-Lujjain fi Bayan Huquq al-Zawjain* (The Bond of Two Waves in Explaining a Couple's Rights). Syeikh Nawawi was a very famous religious leader from Banten, West Java who lived between 1813 and 1898. He once was the *imam* (prayer leader) at the Masjidil Haram (the prime mosque in Mecca, where the Ka'bah, as the centre of praying direction, stands inside). His name was also put in *Al Munjid*, a famous Arabic dictionary written by Louis Ma'luf (Amin & Anshory, 1989:95). Moreover, he was the teacher of prominent Indonesian *kyais* such as K.H. Cholil Bangkalan from Madura and K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari from Tebuireng, Jombang. Although the above mentioned *kitab kuning* might be expected to talk about men and women, Syeikh Nawawi mainly mentions what women had to do at home and in their everyday social relations (Wahid et al., 2001:xxvi-xxviii). This *kitab kuning* also maintains that the total obedience of women to their husbands is part of their religious duties (Wahid et al., 2001:127). Women are also described as having to serve men's biological needs (Wahid et al., 2001:64-65). Although this *kitab kuning* is not used as *muqarrar* (prime reference) in *pesantren* –it is only taught during Ramadan– most *kyai* and *santri* know about it (Bisri, 2001:ix). Because of its gender-biased views some *kyai* are opposed to teaching this *kitab kuning* in *pesantren*. K.H. Bisri Mustofa, according to his son K.H Mustofa Bisri, once said that teaching this *kitab kuning* would cause men to become arrogant (*besar kepala* big head) (Bisri, 2001:x). Recently, a constructive effort was carried out by FK3 (Forum for Studying (Reviewing) the Classical Texts) chaired by Sinta Nuriyah

Abdurrahman Wahid, a prominent member of Muslimat NU. In 2001, it published a book entitled *Wajah Baru Relasi Suami-Istri* (New Face on the Husband-Wife Relations) reviewing gender-biased views in the Syeikh Nawawi's *kitab kuning* (Wahid et al., 2001).

Bruinessen maintains that the mixture of Islamic teachings with local customs in the Middle East that emphasized women's subordination by men produced new gender-biased Islamic cultures. Since cultures are dynamic and apt to change, a *kitab kuning* historically produced by those highly gendered cultures would be incompatible with the modern times (1995:173). For example, '*Uqudul Lujjayn* says that a wife is not permitted to talk to her husband's friend if the latter visits her home while her husband is absent in order to preserve her husband's jealousy (Wahid et al., 2001:155). In this regard FK3 argues that such teachings are incompatible with modern life where such attitudes of a woman towards her husband's friend would be considered harsh. In its place FK3 proposes, thus, that husband and wife have to promote mutual trust (Wahid et al., 2001:155). Here, Syeikh Nawawi's point of view in '*Uqudul Lujjayn* is understood as reflecting his context. A similar argument about the relation between gender and historical context is made by scholars in gender studies. For instance, Kimmel writes "If the meanings of gender vary from culture to culture and vary within any one culture over historical time, then understanding gender must employ the tools of the social and behavioral sciences and history" (2000:3). The need for contextual reinterpretation of classical texts in order to have new definitions about relations between men and women from the religious perspective, thus, has become an important issue. The book published by FK3 (Wahid et al., 2001) is a step in this direction.

In addition, writers of *kitab kuning* were male (Bruinessen, 1995:173). He argues that males will use their experience to expose their superiority in *kitab kuning* and to impose it as the standard of piety. For instance, with regard to women's menstruation and *mandi wajib* (obligatory shower), expression of *kitab kuning* often give the impression that women are not *suci* (pure) while they are in such condition. The aftermath shower is likely to purify them. However, as

showed by Bruinessen (1995:178), a small *kitab kuning* written by Fatimah from Banjarmasin in Malay, uses a more neutral expression by avoiding the term *suci*. Thus, by making women less pure while in menstruation, men want to impose their superiority over women. Men's dominance in the writing of *kitab kuning* permits this religious interpretation. A parallel idea is posed by Simmel (as cited in Kimmel, 2000:8) who says "Man's position of power does not only assure his relative superiority over the women but it assures that his standards become generalized as generically human standards that are to govern the behavior of men and women alike". Therefore, a sufficient number of women in power is necessary to change gender-unbalanced views and attitudes. Within these arguments the emergence of *kyai perempuan* (female religious scholar) in *pesantren* is a good sign.

Negotiating gender relations within political contexts

A similar argument to Kimmel's above-mentioned view that meanings of gender are historically-specific can be held with regard to negotiating gender relations. The process of negotiation does not happen in an empty space. Through its history, negotiations conducted by Muslimat vis-à-vis NU to gain better gender relations occurred within different political contexts and in different historical eras.

It is interesting that some writers make an analogy about the relations between Muslimat and NU like the relations between a wife and husband in a family. For instance, Masdar F. Mas'udi (1999:31), one of the leaders of NU, points out that discriminations which occur within NU reflect the structural power of a family brought into the structure of the organisation (see Diagram 2 for the Organisational Structure of NU). But what he forgets in his explanation about discriminative relations between Muslimat and NU is that the family of NU lives in a space where norms and values about gender relations promoted discriminative attitudes and even practice. Thus, as far as negotiations within NU's family could improve gender relations they still depended on external factors (such as political factors) whether the latter supported or hindered better relations.

In understanding negotiating gender relations within the political contexts, attention must be paid to the state functioning as a significant agent in shaping forms of gender relations. The state, as Waylen (1996:15) maintains, “partly reflects and partly helps to create particular forms of gender relations and gender inequality”. This means that the state or at least different ruling governments which represent different political contexts at some points have created different forms of gender relations. A similar argument was maintained by Alvares (as cited in Rai, 1996:31) saying that “under different political regimes and at distinct historical conjunctures, the State is potentially a mechanism either for social change or social control in women’s lives”. For example, the end of colonial rule in Indonesia brought new opportunities for women to articulate overtly their interests by making repeated demands for more governmental attention to problems such as female employment, marriage legislation, etc. (Douglas, 1980:163). These interests were acknowledged by the colonial government, for example marriage repudiation (Vreede-de Struers, 1960:100-103). Women started to participate in foreign affairs such as being delegates to international meetings. Furthermore, as Parawansa (2002:70) maintains, the newly independent government accommodated women’s interests. She goes on to say that as a consequence women’s organisations flourished. Negotiating new forms of gender relations could advance in the particular political circumstance.

The New Order era provides examples of how the state (or the government) could exert its power to control gender relations which influenced women’s inequality at the level of the organisation. The beginning of the New Order regime defined women as to act as *pendamping suami* ‘standing at the side of their husband’ (Oey-Gardiner, 2002:102). Defined as such women suffered inequality with regard to their relations with men. At the organisational level, for instance, wives of civil servants had to cooperate with the state by being active in Dharma Wanita, an organisation which was set up to support their husband’s career (Oey-Gardiner, 2002:103). Other organisations, especially women’s organisations had to follow this model if they did not want to be considered ‘deviant’, for example the accusation that women’s organisations were used by PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) in order to break up the society (Tien

Soeharto [1969] as cited in Zuhri et al., 1979:160). Within this political context negotiating gender equality was not expected to advance very far.

But how could certain advances in gender relations deteriorate? One of the arguments is that men at certain points felt frightened that equal relationships might reduce men's power or even vanish altogether. For instance, Kimmel (2000:93) argues that "men maybe in power everywhere one cares to look, individual men are not "in power," and they do not feel powerful". Since those individual men are less powerful than one imagines then any change in gender relations between men and women as two distinct groups can have an affect on individual men's power as well; individual men will try to maintain their power over women by holding it together in a group. What Hannah Arendt (as cited in Kimmel, 2000:93-94) defines about power in this regard is interesting.

Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with...disappears, "his power" also vanishes.

The fact that values which maintain gender inequality are always socially reproduced means that in specific political circumstances there can be a deterioration of gender relations. Among traditional Muslims, as I have previously explained, *pesantren* still teach *kitab kuning* which maintain gender inequality. Although counter discourses have been promoted (e.g. the publications of FK3 proposing new reinterpretations of gender-biased classical texts) still their number is small and more effort is needed.

Having said that political intervention of the state might control gender relations and promote less equality, however, it does not necessarily mean that the process of negotiations between the two groups, men and women, within a certain 'space' of the state does not occur (see also Waylen, 1996:16; more examples are given by Rai, 1996). Neither does it mean that gender relations do not advance or

decline in all their aspects. Negotiations and strategies to improve better relations were always employed whether the political circumstances supported or hindered them. For instance, Muslimat and NU still negotiated their relation under the New Order regime. A *fatwa* supporting family planning was delivered by NU in 1969 as a response to Muslimat NU's demand (Zuhri et al., 1979:112). With regard to negotiating gender relations within NU this deliverance of *fatwa* was a step in the direction of more equal relations. Thus, what I want to argue is that women within NU could gain significant advances in equal gender relations if political circumstances as well as religious interpretation of texts supported the project.

Chapter two: The establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat

In order to better understand the role of Muslimat NU within Women's movements in Indonesia, particularly among Muslim women and its struggle to gain better relations with its male partner, it is important to consider first the historical development of Muslimat NU. During its history Muslimat NU has changed its objectives from its first stated aims as mainly concerned with social and religious duties. Less than ten years after the establishment of Muslimat in 1946, it started to participate actively in formal politics within the NU Party in addition to its traditional concerns about social and religious affairs.

In this chapter, I start with a brief account of two women's movements in Indonesia which played an important role in motivating women of NU to organise themselves in an organisation: Aisyiyah and the women's section of Sarekat Islam. An incident involving Soekarno, the first President of Indonesia after the independence, about the use of *tabir* (curtain) as the borderline between men and women in a Muhammadiyah meeting was another important factor for the establishment of Muslimat NU which I also discuss.

State of Muslim women's movements in the 1930s

Although the establishment of Muslimat NU was likely to be influenced by the emergence of many Indonesian women's movements since the beginning of the twentieth century, there are two women's organisations that are usually mentioned in Muslimat NU's publications, namely Aisyiyah, and the women's section of Sarekat Islam (Zuhri et al., 1979:41-42; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:13). Both organisations dwelt on the minds of the women of NU to begin their journey with

NU to seek women's emancipation. In addition, these two organisations promoted an approach to Islam which was different from that of the women of NU. Aisyiyah and the women's section of Sarekat Islam followed the modernist Islam approach whereas women of NU were Muslim traditionalists. Furthermore, these organisations could serve as a model for women of NU with regard to their formation since both organisations were initially formed by their male respective organisations (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:13).

According to Nizar (2002:81), Aisyiyah was founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and was originally called Sopo Tresno (Someone Loves). It was established in 1914. In 1917, it was renamed Aisyiyah under the leadership of Nyai Ahmad Dahlan and became then the women's section of Muhammadiyah (Nizar, 2002:81). The primary role played by Nyai Ahmad Dahlan in the formation of Aisyiyah, according to White (2004:28), is accepted by most writers within this organisation. The main aim of the organisation was "to increase the status of women based on Islamic teachings" (Nizar, 2002:81). In order to reach this aim Aisyiyah published its own magazine called Suara Aisyiyah (The voice of Aisyiyah) and worked to educate women. Already since 1919 Aisyiyah operated the "Froebel School" for children and established literacy courses in both the Arabic and Latin scripts (Nizar, 2002:82). In 1922, it initiated the establishment of a mosque dedicated especially for women called *masjid wanita* (women's mosque) (Pijper, 1987:3). According to Nizar, members of Aisyiyah had grown to approximately 5,000 women in 1929 organising 32 schools with 75 teachers (2002:81-82).

These efforts shown by Aisyiyah, especially in women's education, were likely to motivate women of NU. In addition, as a reformist organisation, Aisyiyah often eschewed traditional practices such as *selamatan* (meal of religious character) and called for its abandonment. It regarded *selamatan* as "dangerous because such rites were directed to the spirit world, inciting the sin of polytheism" (White, 2004:21-22). Such reformist views were also taught through the schools that Aisyiyah operated and religious meetings it held. These views and other religious practices motivated women of NU to hold together to reject them.

In a book edited by Helmy and Ma'shum, Asmah Sjachruni, for instance, told an example of violent reactions of some people in her village against the modernist views and practices. "There was an incident where a man slapped his nephew when returning from the mosque because he saw his nephew wearing trousers without *kopiyah* (hat) instead of a sarong while praying" (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:13).

Sarekat Islam which was established in 1912 by Hadji Samanhoeddhi in Surakarta (Noer, 1973:106) was described by Aisyah Dachlan (1955:23) as having "opened the eyes of *kaum bapa* (fathers) and *kaum adat* (traditional group) towards the women's problem in Indonesia". In fact, Sarekat Islam was an organisation which promoted the views which "rejected inequality in the law, recognized the equality of (Muslim) men and women and the equality of husband and wife" (Noer, 1973:141). Sarekat Islam had a women's section called Wanudijo Utomo and later on it changed to SPII (Sarekat Perempuan Islam Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Muslim Women) (Vreede-de Stuers, 1960:66; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:50). Although little information is available about this organisation, a future leader of Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat was attested to join this organisation prior to the establishment of Muslimat. According to Lathifah Hasyim (interview), her mother, Mahmudah Mawardi, who led Muslimat from 1950 to 1979, was previously a member of SPII and therefore sat in the KNIP (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat or Indonesian provisional parliament) to represent this organisation.

Tabir (The curtain)

I have mentioned earlier that the incident involving Soekarno about the *tabir* was another factor which encouraged women of NU to participate in the organisation. It was in December 1938, Soekarno, accompanied by his wife, was invited to attend a Muhammadiyah meeting in Bengkulu and he decided to leave the meeting after they entered the hall. Soekarno, according to Antara (the Indonesian news agency), said that he had done that as a protest over the use of *tabir* in the meeting. He further stated that *tabir*, which usually consists of a white curtain

separating men and women in a meeting or in a prayer room, is the symbol of slavery which is not part of Islamic requirements but is a custom promoted by the community (see for the details in White, 2004:120). Following this statement from Soekarno, heated debates were aroused within the Muhammadiyah circle and other Muslim groups, including among the women of NU. Zuhri says that the Soekarno's statement, reported in *Adil* magazine January 21, 1939, created debates about the role of women (Zuhri et al., 1979:40). She further commented that issues ranging from the emphasis of women's domestic roles such as taking care of their children to the demand for gender equality such as women's education and women's employment rose (Zuhri et al., 1979:40).

However, the discussion about the *tabir* from the religious perspective was unlikely to attract much attention. For instance, a collection of NU's *fatwa* (religious advice) between 1926 and 1994 –though it lacks some *fatwa* from several congresses– does not mention a single *fatwa* about it (Masyhuri, 1997). Some published books by Muslimat NU only mention the practice of using *tabir*. Women, for instance, “attended the meeting as listeners behind the *tabir*” during the 1938 and 1939 Congresses of NU (Dachlan A, 1955:32). Another book mentions that the use of *tabir* was slowly abandoned right after 1959 (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:84).

Asmah Sjachruni and Umroh Machfudzoh, during the interview, told of their experience regarding the *tabir*. Asmah was invited to attend a regional conference of NU of South Kalimantan held in 1954 where *ulama* delegates from the central board also attended. She was invited because she had a bright concept about the political strategies for the 1955 elections. When she was approached by the committee, she agreed to present her concept in front of the *ulama* on the condition that she was allowed to talk without a *tabir* like men presenters would do. She noted that the meeting was held in Martapura where *ulama* strictly applied the religious teaching on *tabir*. Her demand was then agreed to and she presented her idea accompanied by her secretary. She further commented, “When women prove that they have the necessary quality, the *tabir* is abandoned, the *tabir* in its true meaning”.

Umroh Machfudzoh had another experience. She was one of the campaigners for the NU Party during the 1955 elections in Central Java along with prominent leaders of NU such as Zainul Arifin and Idham Khalid though she was a young woman of 18-19 years of age. During the campaign she rarely saw the *tabir* being use even at village level. She observed that women were often separated from men by sitting in the mosque close to the place where such campaigns were held.

Embryo of Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat

In the years prior to the official foundation of Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat or NUM in 1946, women of NU members were active in religious meetings (*pengajian*) organised by NU. According to K.H.M. Dachlan, who was the chairperson of NU's branch in Bangil, Pasuruan, East Java, in 1930, women of NU were active in *pengajian* held by NU such as Ibu Aslihah, wife of K.H. Wahab Chasbullah, a well known *ulama* (religious scholar) and one of the founders of NU (1955:9). He goes on to say that such participation of women of NU was also seen in other regions. In addition, women attended meetings held by NU even though they were separated from male participants behind *tabir* (curtain) (Dachlan M, 1955:9).

Dachlan comments on the period of the early twentieth century: "Unlike today, the situation at that time was different. We were still under the Dutch occupation and our male leaders did not allow women to be involved in any organisation" (Dachlan M, 1955:10). Aisjah Dachlan says that "NU still believed that the entry of women in NU would pose more problems (*mudharat*) than benefits (*manfa'at*) (Dachlan A, 1955:27). Some restrictive regulations of the Dutch administration applied to organisations such as what happened to Sarekat Islam put fear in NU leaders if they were applied to the women of NU. Sarekat Islam became subject of Beperkt Vergader Verbod (BVV) –limited prohibition of meetings- in 1934 (Noer, 1973:205). The BVV according to Noer (1973:206),

often meant the prohibition of a 'meeting' of three persons who belonged the same party. This social party, for example when visiting friends or a small *kenduri*, was considered a party meeting and consequently, many

party members were sentenced, or, at least, brought to the police station for a hearing.

But from the women's perspective the objection of NU to the participation of women in organisations indicated the *ulama* were following the traditional view found in the *kitab kuning*, that women's appropriate place was their home. For instance, Aisjah Dachlan argues that *ulama* still thought that it was not an appropriate time yet for women to join organisations. Women were still imprisoned in the household — and were not allowed to go outside (Dachlan A, 1955:27).

Despite the fact that women were not permitted to be members of NU, this situation did not discourage them from coming en masse to the national congresses of NU. As mentioned by K.H.M. Dachlan who later wrote the *Muslimat's* by-laws "However, many of our women were courageous. They dared to attend NU's congresses massively and urged to be accepted as members of NU" (Dachlan M, 1955:10). In 1938, NU at last organised a special public meeting for women during the thirteenth congress of NU held in Menes, Banten. It was reported that nearly 8,000 women attended this event. "They crowded the building where the NU Congress was held, so that no more seats were left and people stood. About 2,000 women were inside and 6,000 more were outside the building" (Dachlan A, 1955:30).

In this public meeting, women heard not only male *ulama* speak but for the first time they also heard two women who stood on the podium giving a speech to the audience. After the speech of K.H. Wahab Chasbullah who insisted on the same obligation on men and women to learn and follow the Islamic teachings, and the speech of other *ulama*, Nyi R. Djuaesih who was the wife of a board member of NU of Bandung and who was herself a female preacher representing 'Muslimat' (female Muslims) of Bandung gave her speech. She explained to the audience the principles and aims of the NU organisation. She also underlined the importance of women's education (Dachlan A, 1955:31-32; Zuhri et al., 1979:42; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:19 & 110-112).

The participation of such large numbers of women of Banten in the NU congress of 1938 might be explained by the fact that many of the local *pesantren* have already had received female *santri* and more so than in the other regions. A Banten official reportedly reported to Pijper that in the early 1930s many of *pesantren* near Pandeglang Banten contained students of both sexes. He was told that in 1915 his informant could by a fortunate accident meet a young girl in the same *pesantren* and she later became his wife (Pijper, 1987:20). A previous report by Berg in 1881 even mentions that many young girls of Banten and Priangan could read and write as a result of spending time in *pesantren* (as cited in Dobbin, 1979:59).

Prior to the establishment of Muslimat, female participation in education in different bases of NU was also attested. For instance, Vreede-de Stuers (1960:72) says that in 1930, *pesantren* of Tebuireng directed by K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari opened a section reserved for women. Yet, about a decade before, according to Marcoes-Natsir and Hasyim (1997:10), K.H. Bisri Syansuri opened a *pesantren* for females. He even worried about the permission from K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari for this initiative. According to Marcoes-Natsir and Hasyim, K.H. Bisri Syansuri had to hide his female *santri* when K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari visited his *pesantren* (1997:10). In 1933, Mahmudah Mawardi with her friends established a *madrasah* for female students named Madrasah Nahdlatul Muslimat at Kauman, Surakarta. This *madrasah* developed and consisted then from the elementary to the senior high school (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:116).

The event of Menes, Banten, marked a more serious involvement of women inside the NU organisation. It also signalled the willingness of women to join NU as active members. In following years, at every national congress of NU, a special public meeting for women became a routine agenda. At the fourteenth congress of NU held in Magelang, Central Java, in 1939, about 4,000 women gathered in the courtyard beside the building where the congress was held. All delegates from different branches of NU went outside and started the meeting together with the women and separated by curtains to hear the speech of *Rais Akbar* (grand chairman), K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari (Dachlan A, 1955:35).

Some progress was observed at this time. First, a woman took the chair of the meeting after the male leaders had given their speeches. Second, there were a number of female delegates particularly from different parts of Central Java representing their respective regions. Third, about 25 women delegates attended enthusiastically meetings of NU's congress though from behind the curtains (Dachlan A, 1955:33).

In the following year, 1940, at the fifteenth Congress of NU held in Surabaya, the door was more open for women to be recognized by NU, though the majority of male delegates still opposed it. NU women's meeting of this year released a proposal seeking essentially the acceptance of Muslimat as a permanent and active section of NU. Among items of this proposition were that Muslimat would have their own by-laws as well as a formal structure of their board. Almost all of the items in the proposal were agreed to by NU except the demand of a city tour (Dachlan A, 1955:38). However, the majority of NU male delegates still opposed the idea of the creation of a separate section of Muslimat. The idea was still debated and finally reached a compromise, which was to defer the matter to Syuriah NU (Supreme Religious Council) (see Diagram 2) (Dachlan A, 1955:36).

In this 1940 Congress, there were women delegates from different parts of Java such as Bandung, Cirebon, and Indramayu of West Java, Tegal and Kroya of Central Java, and Jombang and Jember of East Java beside delegates from Surabaya itself (Dachlan A, 1955:36). It was reported, among others, that Muslimat of Surabaya already had 14 *madrasah* (religious school), while Muslimat from Cirebon, for instance, had conducted regular courses in religious teachings, Arabic and Dutch languages for their members (Dachlan A, 1955:40).

In the war period

After the fourteenth congress of NU held in 1940, the prospect of Muslimat being admitted as a separate section remained uncertain. The beginning of World War II in the Pacific theatre and then the Japanese occupation of Indonesia changed the

situation. Among the effects of this war were that on the one hand it revived Indonesian nationalism, but on the other hand, it made Indonesian citizens vulnerable, especially women.

The outbreak of the war with the Japanese in 1941 had affected NU's existence and of Muslimat. Japan, which proclaimed itself as an "old brother" of the Great East Asia, had entered finally Indonesian territory in 1942 through Batavia (Jakarta), and had succeeded in superseding the Dutch government's long occupation over Indonesia. During their occupation, the Japanese had changed certain important policies. It offered to Indonesians a greater degree of opportunity to become involved in political organisations than had ever been possible under Dutch rule. The attitude of the Japanese occupation towards religious leaders was far more accommodating than the Dutch had been. According to Bastin, the realistic understanding of the key role of *ulama* in peasant life had pushed the Japanese to win allies among religious leaders. They "have felt that religious leaders were politically less sophisticated and hence ideologically more reliable than Western-educated intellectuals" (1967:149). This approach could smooth the Japanese management of the rural area (Abdul Kadir, 1999:122). This policy brought rural and urban religious leaders together in mass movements under military or naval control (Bastin, 1967:149).

At first MIAI (Al-Majlis al-Islami al-A'la Indonesia or the Indonesian High Islamic Council) took advantages from the same Japanese policy (Bruinessen, 1994:54). According to Fealy (1996:17), MIAI was an organisation which the foundation was initiated by Wahab Chasbullah (NU), Ahmad Dahlan (NU), Mas Mansoer (Muhammadiyah), and Wondoamiseno (SI) and they held the meeting in Wahab's house in September 1937 (see also Noer, 1973:242). This organisation was originally founded as a reaction to several Dutch policies perceived to be contrary to Islamic law such as the proposed draft on Marriage Law (Bruinessen, 1994:50). According to Abdul Kadir, MIAI was the first arena for NU to participate in the nationalist struggle (1999:122; see also Bruinessen, 1994:51). Although leaders of NU were founders of MIAI, NU appreciated less

this organisation mainly because leaders of Sarekat Islam wanted to take the leadership (Noer, 1973:243).

But later, the Japanese occupation regarded that MIAI could have endangered the government by proposing activities such as establishing *bait al-mal* (Muslim treasury) which collected religious donations. In September 1943, the Japanese announced that only two Muslim organisations would be legalised as national organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah (Benda, 1985:185; Bruinessen, 1994:54-55). This announcement made MIAI feel that it might be banned by the Japanese and it forced the organisation to self dissolve. In November 1943, Majelis Sjiro Muslimin Indonesia (Advisory Council of Indonesian Muslims) or Masjumi was established with the blessing and the protection of the Japanese (Benda, 1985:186; Bruinessen, 1994:55). Like MIAI, this organisation was aimed at federating Muslim organisations but it allowed individual members as well with the condition that the Japanese gave the permission. Personal membership of *kyai* or *ulama* had to get the permission from Shumubu, the department of religious affairs formed by the Japanese in 1942 (Benda, 1985:185, 273). In the beginning, this organisation mainly took NU and Muhammadiyah members as the committee because only both organisations were at first legalised by the Japanese (Benda, 1985:185; Bruinessen, 1994:55). During the Japanese occupation Masjumi was a non-political organisation focusing on religious issues but it became an important political party after the Indonesian independence.

Following the establishment of Masjumi, K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari, a leader of NU, was appointed as the head of Shumubu as well. His son, K.H. Wahid Hasjim (he represented his father who preferred to stay in Tebuireng), and Mas Mansoer from Muhammadiyah later became the head of this department. This department had served, as claimed by Abdul Kadir, as the main artery of contact between the Japanese officials and the *kyai* (1999:122). Through this department, Masjumi came in effect to govern alongside the Japanese and on the other hand lessened the role of the nationalist (Abdul Kadir, 1999:123; Benda, 1985:186).

Although leaders of NU were involved in Shumubu, NU itself decided to be inactive. It limited its activities to focus on religious teaching. According to

Dachlan (1955:42), this was largely the result of a more severe situation faced by almost all Indonesians during the Japanese occupation. Under such circumstance NU aimed just at fortifying Indonesian Muslims to uphold their Islamic faith (Dachlan A, 1955:42). This affected the establishment of Muslimat since this had to be decided at an NU congress. Dachlan further stated that during the Japanese time, parents were urged to marry their under age daughters because of their fear of the Japanese troops (Dachlan A, 1955:42). Asmah Sjachruni tells her story: “Once, my relative was forced to kill a Japanese soldier because he almost raped his sister”. She herself had a similar experience “the Japanese troops asked me who I am, I replied in Japanese that I am a teacher, and they felt ashamed and walked away” (Helmy & Ma’shum, 2002:23).

The Jihad Resolution

After the Japanese government has notified the Allied Forces of its surrender following the atomic holocaust at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Indonesian leaders proclaimed the independence of Indonesia on August 17, 1945. This proclamation was supported by Indonesian people including the *ulama*. The *ulama* within NU considered that the proclamation of the new nation was religiously legitimate and as such it had to be defended. According to Bruinessen (1994:61), before the coming of the Japanese occupation NU had accepted the *de facto* Dutch administration and thought that people should follow it, even though it was not a Muslim administration, since it still allowed Muslims to practice their religion. In fact, the attitude of NU was in accordance with the *sunni* tradition in which it was preferable to avoid chaos and anarchy caused by revolts, even when the rulers were not Muslims, as long as they allowed Muslims to sustain an Islamic way of life (see also Abdul Kadir, 1999:125). However, the Japanese occupation ended the Dutch administration and when the Japanese surrendered there was no longer any “legitimate” administration for Indonesian Muslims. Therefore, the newly proclaimed independent state was religiously legitimate.

This religious view influenced NU, whose attitude was previously moderate and accommodative towards the Dutch administration, to change to a

more radical view. Instead of acceptance, the Dutch faced fierce opposition. On October 21 and 22, 1945 NU held a meeting joined by all delegates from Java and Madura in which NU announced the *Jihad* Resolution. The resolution declared that rising up and taking arms against enemies to defend Indonesian sovereignty and treating as enemies anyone who bears arms against the country was an individual religious obligation (*wajib 'ain*) for both Muslim men and women (Dachlan A, 1955:43, Zuhri, 1980:131; and see Bruinessen, 1994:303-306 for the complete resolution). Alongside this declaration of *jihad*, the war against the Dutch and its alliances became a holy war. It guaranteed anyone who died in the war in the name of Islam the status of a martyr and an automatic place in heaven (Abdul Kadir, 1999:123).

This resolution succeeded in garnering mass support for armed conflict with the Dutch and the Allies. The *ulama* and their followers, under the banner Hizbullah (God's party/army), Sabilillah (fight in the God's path) and, sometimes, Mujahidin (fighters) fought together against the returning Dutch administration. Among these troops, the Hizbullah was the most prepared since it was trained during the Japanese occupation. The Sabilillah, according to Bruinessen (1994:60), consisted of non-regular troops that were formed in response to the war condition. NU sources suggest that the Sabilillah was the army of *ulama* and consisted of older people. It served as a companion of the Hizbullah (Zuhri, 1977:212). Meanwhile the Mujahidin was the lesser known troops. According to Zuhri (1980:131), the Mujahidin was commanded by K.H.A. Wahab Chasbullah. Some *pesantren*, facing the situation of war, changed their function to become army posts. Some *kyai* were known for their *berkah* (blessing prayer) by distributing *jimat* (amulets) (Zuhri, 1980:131). The most striking example of these fights in order to defend the sovereignty of the new nation occurred when the British army came to East Java acting as Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) regain control of the administration from the Japanese. A violent combat broke out between the British army and the people of Surabaya and its surrounding on November 10, 1945. It is reported that people often cried *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great) to raise their combative spirits (Noer, 1987:125).

In such combat, Muslim women of NU took an active part. The most common activity was providing logistics such as *dapur umum* (public kitchens). Some were involved in forming the Sabilillah Red Cross to help injured people both military and civilian personnel (Noer, 1987:125). There were other Muslim women who bore weapons or worked in espionage and liaison work in areas occupied by the Allies (Dachlan A, 1955:43; Douglas, 1980:163). For instance, Asmah Sjachruni, one of the first members of parliament from Muslimat, told of her experience,

My profession as a teacher was used for liaison between the army in the forest and people living in the city...We became liaison officers in giving information and sending food from people sympathizing with our struggle. I went in and out by camouflage (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:24).

Furthermore, Asmah Sjachruni's oratorical skill was helpful in enhancing mass support for the struggle for independence (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:26).

Following the involvement of the Muslim women in the armed combat, at the 16th Congress held in 1946, NU delivered a *fatwa* (religious advice) in this regard. The *fatwa* says that women's participation in a physical war became obligatory when the enemy entered the region, just as it was for men. However, the training camps for female combatants should be separated from those of men. The *fatwa* also underlined that women could wear uniforms as long as they covered their *aurat* (parts of body which have to be covered) (Masyhuri, 1997:204). A similar *fatwa* was also released by the Majelis Syuro of Masjumi presided over at that time by K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari, *Rais Akbar* (great leader) of NU (Noer, 1987:126). However, Noer notes a slight difference from NU *fatwa* regarding the uniforms. The female uniform must be different from the male one for the sake of avoiding confusion between male and female combatants (1987:126).

The formation of the Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat (NUM) as a section of NU

While the war between the Dutch and the Indonesian people was still going on, NU held its 16th Congress in Purwokerto, Central Java, on March 26 – 29, 1946. This congress was the first congress of NU since NU had been forced to be politically inactive by the Japanese occupation. In the congress, the male delegates finally agreed by acclamation that Muslimat⁶ would be part of NU as a separate section under the name of Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat (NUM), yet, after a sharp debate until the last night of congress. The authority of K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari, *Rais Akbar* of NU and K.H.A. Wahab Chasbullah was used in order to achieve the acclamation (Dachlan A, 1984:92). K.H.M. Dachlan, chairman of NU central board at that time, told his story in this regard as follows (Dachlan M, 1955:10).

My heart is touched and at the same time concerned when I remember how were the reactions of some *bapak* (men/fathers) who totally disagreed with Muslimat beginning as part of NU. As the chairman of NU at that time, with humility, I gave them reasons and arguments which showed the importance of Muslimat being integrated within NU and how dangerous if they were still on the outside.

Dachlan notes the importance of the authority of leading *kyai* in achieving this end (i.e. their signatures were used to persuade all delegates)

⁶ In Muslimat's publications, the word Muslimat or to be exact Muslima^at (with double 'a' to signal that the sound 'a' is pronounced long) had already been used long before the establishment of NU Muslimat in 1946. For instance, Aisjah Dachlan, based on the official archive of 1938, mentions the use of Muslima^at by Nyi R. Djuaisih, the woman speaker, in this meeting (1955:32). The use of this word is more evident from the 1939 meeting (Dachlan A, 1955:35). However, the word Muslima^at can also mean Muslim women, thus it is not clear whether they used the word for its meaning or for naming. My opinion is that women of NU in several NU bases had already organised themselves before 1938 (see also K.H.M. Dachlan's witness previously cited). Even the name Muslima^at might have been circulated. The event of 1938 was, thus, the result of accumulated works done before. For instance, Ma'shum & Zawawi (1996:111) mention that Nyi R. Djuaisih had regularly attended NU's conference to accompany her husband who was an NU district board member. It can be assumed that she was not unique, so she met other women in such conferences and set up an agenda for an important women's meeting (e.g. like the 1938 event). I have also mentioned the establishment of a *madrasah* called Nahdlatul Muslimat (awakening of Muslim women) in 1933 by Mahmudah Mawardi who later on became the general chairperson of Muslimat NU. It is to note this mixed name drawing together two words from Nahdlatul Ulama and Muslimat. Thus, the need for official acknowledgement from NU was apparently for double reasons, first it was an issue of asking 'permission' from 'husbands' and secondly women of NU felt the need for exchanging information, uniting and coordinating their effort, and expanding their ideas through new branches.

Because of his excellency Hadratus Sjech K.H. Hasjim Asjari and K.H. Wahab Chasbullah who have already signed the Muslimat's by-laws, the NU Congress finally agreed by acclamation the entering of Muslimat as part of NU. (Dachlan M, 1955:10)

K.H.M. Dachlan and his secretary A. Aziz Dijar set up Muslimat's by-laws. This congress also validated the first structure of Muslimat (Dachlan A, 1955:45; Zuhri et al., 1979:46; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:20). The 29th of March is celebrated then as the birthday of Muslimat.

In this congress, NU released a *fatwa* regarding the Muslim's permission for joining an organisation which was not based on Islam. NU stated that it was *haram* (prohibited) for the Muslim joining an organisation if it harmed Islam. It was good if the organisation gave benefit for Islam, and it was *jaiz* (permitted) if the organisation did not either harm or benefit Islam (Masyhuri, 1994:205).

We can see that the circumstances of Muslimat's formation were in the war period. The war and the *jihad* resolution impacted on the women of NU in that they were more visible in public life. NU men, on the other hand, acknowledged the importance of women's participation: during the war periods, women supported men in distributing logistics and helped them in nurseries. Moreover, some women of NU participated on the front line. All these experiences triggered women of NU to organise themselves and encouraged them to urge NU that a Muslimat section should be rapidly formed. The following citation by Aisjah Dachlan (1955:45) reflects on this view.

In the middle of increasing combative spirits in holding up the Republic of Indonesia where women Muslimat took active part, women of NU felt that it was time for them to organise themselves since women should face women's matters by themselves.

Meanwhile male NU members realised that women's all out participation during the war was significant. Some leaders of NU even feared that women of NU might join other organisations if they were not accepted as part of NU (Dachlan M, 1955:10). So, a special section where women could organise

themselves was needed. The following testimony of K.H.M. Dachlan (1955:10) supports this view.

In the middle of the fight for independence, they [women] were not yet accepted within NU. Meanwhile, non-NU women have already joined different organisations and political parties. At that time I pushed *Pak Kyai* Wahab and Hadratus Sjech K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari for accepting Muslimat as part of NU. In addition, the fight for the Motherland urged and needed women forces struggling hand in hand with men.

The first Muslimat chairperson was Chadijah Dachlan from Pasuruan. She was actually the wife of K.H.M. Dachlan, one of committee members of NU's Central Board at that time. The proposed chairperson of Muslimat in 1940 had been Nyi R. Hindun from Surabaya (Zuhri et al., 1979:45). The appointment of Chadijah Dachlan could be seen as a pragmatic choice. The nation was in a war situation. The war forced NU in 1945 to move its central board office from Surabaya to Pasuruan and into K.H.M. Dachlan's own house that became the office following the deteriorating security situation in Surabaya. It was an emergency situation. Thus, choosing Chadijah Dachlan, the wife of K.H.M. Dachlan, made the matter of organising the Muslimat easier. Similar event happened in 1947 when NU was again enforced to remove its office to Madiun, after Pasuruan was occupied by the Dutch army. The Muslimat office was also moved to Madiun (Dachlan A, 1955:55; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996: 99).

However, Chadijah Dachlan was a figure of the Muslimat in her own right who fought for improvement of the women's situation. Her preface to the first Muslimat first by-law criticised the lack of male attention toward women. She wrote:

Indeed women's matters were less considered, neither by the common people nor by the leaders. This view is wrong and it must be eradicated. The assumption that women should stay only in the kitchen is false and very dangerous for the development of human relationships. This assumption which opposes the current era, religious teachings, and the

certainty of development must be eliminated (as cited in Dachlan A, 1955:51).

Chadijah Dachlan (as cited in Dachlan A, 1955:51) emphasized that the same role should be carried out by men and women in disseminating Allah's (God) teachings and cited the verse of the Quran: "For whosoever does a righteous deed, be they believing men or women, We shall make him live in the best life and We shall recompense them with their wage according to the best of their deeds" (The Quran, 16:97).

Peraturan Khusus, Muslimat's first by-laws

It was mentioned earlier that the first NUM (Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat) by-laws were set up and signed by prominent figures of NU. They were written by K.H.M. Dachlan and A.A. Dijar and agreed and signed by K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari and K.H.A. Wahab Chasbullah. In fact, the first Muslimat by-laws were called *Peraturan Khusus* (special regulations) and not *Anggaran Dasar* (by-laws). This can be understood since the Muslimat in 1946 was only a special female section of NU. As such, the articles of *Peraturan Khusus* should not contradict NU by-laws. Moreover, it is not strange that some of the articles reflect men's points of view, if they do not represent their interests, as it will be discussed.

There are at least three of eleven articles of the *Peraturan Khusus* which are interesting for further discussion, namely, the objectives of the Muslimat; the efforts which Muslimat would make to achieve its goals; and the article relating to the spreading of Muslimat's branches. Some of these articles were felt to be not in accord with the interests of Muslimat itself or with the social and political climate. Those articles were, later on, revised or changed.

Article 3 of the *Peraturan Khusus* mentions that the aims of NUM were, "(t)o make Indonesian Muslim women aware of their duties in order to become *ibu sejati* (the true mother), so they could strengthen and help the work of NU in upholding Islam" (Dachlan A, 1955:48; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:16 of the appendix). We can see that this article reflects a male point of view. The article

emphasizes only the duties of Muslim women and does not mention their rights. In addition, the Muslimat section was meant to support and help NU which was a male-dominated organisation. It is not surprising that this article was soon revised to include the rights of women and became “To make Indonesian Muslim women aware of their rights and duties in order to become *ibu sejati*, so they could strengthen and help the work of NU in upholding the *syariah* of Islam” (Dachlan A, 1955:48).

The term *ibu sejati* in this article is another interesting thing. Sometimes it was translated to *shalihah* or pious women (Dachlan A, 1955:73). However, the more clear meaning of *ibu sejati* is a good woman who is able to manage her household, to educate her children and to serve the community. Chadijah Dachlan in the preface of *Peraturan Khusus* cited an old Arabic saying “*Al bayt mamlakatun tudiruh al mar’ah* (The household is a kingdom managed by the woman).” Being a household manager, which according to Dachlan was introduced along with Islam, was a better place for women since previously women had been treated like slaves (1955:49). A more recent writing mentioned Fatimah Az Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, to describe the ideal woman (Zuhri et al., 1979:32). Zuhri says that this example of Fatimah who was entitled *Sayyidatu Nisaa'il Mukminin* (The leader of the entire Muslim women) should be put as a model woman. She described Fatimah: “Her time was evenly divided to worship (*ibadah*), to arrange the household, to serve her husband, to educate her children, to serve her father, and to struggle for the glorious Islam and its *ummah* (the Islamic community of believers)” (1979:32). Male NU apparently held a similar idea about the role of women as mothers supervising their family. For instance, Masbuchin (1968:36) when discussing the Muslimat says,

All daily religious activities are practiced in the family environment and are practiced continuously. Here, Muslim families as centres of *santri* (pious Muslim) development play their important role. And there we know how big and important is the role of Indonesian Muslimat. Family is where the supervision is the best for one’s behaviour. Further, cementing and keeping the milieu is in the hands of mothers not in the hands of fathers.

The objective of becoming the true mother (*ibu sejati*) might not be unique to the Muslimat. For other women's organisations it had been their concerns at the beginning of the 20th century. For instance, Vreede-de Stuers says,

The objectives of all these organisations and publications that were brought into being between 1913 and 1915 were, as has already been stated, purely social. All aimed at the improvement of the woman position by means of education in household practices, dressmaking classes, courses on child welfare and so forth (1960:64).

But NUM was left behind compared to other contemporary women's organisations. Since the *Peraturan Khusus* was set up by the male dominated NU, this article which limited the objectives of its female section might be another indication of how NU through the *Peraturan Khusus* could still maintain its interests.

Article 4 of the *Peraturan Khusus* concerns the efforts which the Muslimat would make in order to achieve its goals, is another interesting issue. The article says as follows.

Efforts:

To unite Muslim women of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* (followers of the Prophet's tradition and the community)

To raise women's knowledge about Islamic teachings and others

To develop more craft productions and ways of gaining righteous income (Dachlan A, 1955:58; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:17 of the appendix)

The first point of this article constitutes a form of realisation of what is mentioned as "to strengthen and help works of NU" since NU was an organisation which aimed at upholding the concept of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah*.

The article 4c points out that the Muslimat encouraged the production of more crafts for economic reasons. This point was probably driven by the fact that prior to the formation of NUM, women of NU had produced handicrafts. For instance, NU women of Bandung in 1940 reported that they "sell the handicrafts

and foods produced by the students of their school” (Dachlan A, 1955:39). Selling craft products was also reported by women of Surabaya. However, at the 14th congress of NU in 1940, women of NU failed to expose their handcraft products because “the participants lacked preparation” (Dachlan A, 1955:38). Moreover, this point of the article suggests that the women of NU have contributed to the economy of their family. The Muslimat would widen its members’ sources of income by developing their skills particularly in craft production. The emphasis on crafts might also have another significant reason since their production could be done independently at home.

Another interesting article is the article 7 that gives the order for every branch of NU and every sub branch of NU to form women’s sections (NUM) (Dachlan A, 1955:58; Ma’shum & Zawawi, 1996:17 of the appendix). This article rises a question of why should the instruction of forming branches and sub branches be mentioned in the *Peraturan Khusus*. Without doubt this instruction would help the creation of branches of the Muslimat. Yet it indicates a fear that some NU branches or sub branches might not want to open a special female section. The instruction, thus, responded to that fear, especially since this *Peraturan Khusus* has been agreed and signed by K.H. Hasjim Asj’ari and K.H.A. Wahab Chasbullah, two *ulama* who were very respected inside NU.

Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat, a women’s section of NU

As a section of NU, NUM had to rely heavily on NU in its earlier periods. For instance, the Muslimat’s office joined the NU board. From 1946 to 1950, the NUM board office moved three times since every time the NU’s office moved the Muslimat’s office moved as well (Zuhri et al., 1979:153). This was the result of NUM’s first by-laws, article 2, which stipulated that the Board office should follow the NU board office (Dachlan A, 1955:48).

Dachlan states that the period between 1946 until early 1952 was the period of *murahiq* (adolescence) where most of NUM’s activities were under NU supervision (1955:71). The unstable political situation of Indonesia after the

proclaimed independence where the war broke out between Indonesia and the Dutch caused further difficulties for organising activities. Thus, only few activities could be held by NUM such as the leadership training held in 1948. Yet, it attracted enthusiasm from NUM members. Eighty women from several branches participated in this training (1955:55). In addition, Muslimat twice held congresses, which occurred on May 25, 1947 in Madiun and in Jakarta, 1950. The important resolutions released during both congresses were the formation of another nine NUM district commissioners. With regard to NU-Muslimat relations, NU entrusted NUM's most prominent member, Mahmudah Mawardi, as a member of Syuriah NU central board (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:99-100). Moreover members of NUM actively participated in the war as mentioned earlier.

NU and Muslimat within the Masjumi Party

To describe Muslimat's participation in the political practice, attention should first be paid to the involvement of NU in Masjumi. It was through Masjumi that NU slowly changed its orientation from a purely religious organisation into a socio-political organisation. Since Muslimat was a women's section of NU, the involvement of NU in political activities directly and indirectly attracted the Muslimat to the political arena.

Masjumi as a federation of several socioreligious organisations was created in the period of the Japanese occupation as previously discussed. It had continued as such up to the Indonesian proclamation of independence. On November 7 and 8, 1945 Masjumi held a meeting in Yogyakarta. During this meeting, members of Masjumi had agreed to change the orientation of the organisation from a federation of religious organisations to a political party. Since the name Masjumi had been largely known, the majority of delegates voted for the use of this name instead of Partai Rakyat Islam (Muslim Citizen's Party). However, the new name was no longer an abbreviation of Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia as it was before (Noer, 1987:47; Zuhri, 1977:223).

The Masjumi Party retained its dualistic membership where certain organisations as well as individuals could join it. However, after the transformation, non-political organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah and some regional organisations in West Java became “extraordinary members” (Boland, 1971:42; Noer, 1987:48-49). Problems with this dual membership were one of the reasons NU later withdrew from the party (Noer, 1987:53).

The structure of the Masjumi party consisted of the Majelis Syuro or Party Council and the Pengurus Besar or Party Executive. The Majelis Syuro was first headed by K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari, *Rais Akbar* of NU, while his son K.H. Wahid Hasjim, a young leader of NU at that time who had already been a member of the committee to investigate preparations for Indonesian independence (BPUPKI) during the Japanese occupation, became one of the vice-chairmen. Other vice-chairmen were Ki Bagus Hadikusumo from the Muhammadiyah and Kasman Singodimedjo. The executive was headed by Sukiman, a western educated person. He was backed by people such as Abikusno Tjokrosujoso from Sarekat Islam (first Islamic organisation then party emerging in the Dutch period) and Dr. Abu Hanifah (Boland, 1971:42; Noer, 1987:101). Kahin comments that this composition of Masjumi's structure shows the mix of people inside of the party. There were people who “drew much of their inspiration from the teachings of Muhammad ‘Abduh” (i.e. Muslim reformist thinker from Egypt died in 1905) such as Abu Hanifah and later Natsir. People such as the leaders of NU and certain conservative Muhammadiyah formed “the conservative older-religious leaders” wing and in the middle as intermediaries, Sukiman and later Prawoto Mangkusasmito (cited in Boland, 1971:42).

Since Masjumi was a federation of Muslim organisations, the new party was intended to serve as “the Islamic unitary party” (Boland, 1971:42; Noer, 1987:47). The party's first appeal, in this period of defending Indonesian independence, was urging Muslims “to fight in the way of God”. It set up emergency programs in 1946 to realise “the ideals of Islam in state affairs, so that a form of state can be created which is founded on the sovereignty of the people,

and a society which is based on justice, in accordance with the teachings of Islam” (Boland, 1971:43). However, the Masjumi Party always emphasized that the fight for these principles has to be in “a democratic way” (Boland, 1971:43). In addition to this religious program, the party paid attention to the social problems such as the demand for increasing the wages of labourers, the limiting of working hours, social insurance, an agricultural law to protect small farmers, and its improvement of agricultural methods (Noer, 1987:119-120).

There is no information signaling when the women’s section of Masjumi was formed, which was named Muslimat, too. However, it had been already reported that in the first congress held in Surakarta on February 10 – 13, 1946 (a month before the official formation of the Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat), Muslimat Masjumi appealed to the government for limitations on women’s involvement in armed combat in order to protect women and men from bad relationships. Muslimat Masjumi voiced that women should join the Red Cross and formed the Sabilillah (God’s path) Red Cross (Noer, 1987:125).

Like Masjumi, the membership of Muslimat Masjumi also consisted of several women’s organisations including the future Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat (Zuhri et al., 1979:63). This involvement of women of NU in Muslimat Masjumi marked their first participation in politics. In 1946, the chairperson of NUM, Chadidjah Dachlan, was appointed a member of the National Central Committee of Indonesia (KNIP Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat), a temporary parliament before the elections could be conducted. In this committee she represented Masjumi until she died in November 1948 (Dachlan A, 1955:63, Zuhri et al., 1979:57). According to Lathifah Hasyim (interview), her mother, Mahmudah Mawardi who became then the Muslimat’s chairperson in 1950, was another KNIP member representing Masjumi but she was at first appointed from Sarekat Islam element in Masjumi. Aminy (2004:19) mentions the name of Mashud Mahmudah (Mashud is her father’s name) among 30 women in KNIP 1949.

Illustration 1: Traditional *pengajian* (religious study group)



Source: (Department of Information, 1985)

Illustration 2: Cadre training organised by Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat, 1948



Chapter three: The beginning of political participation

The withdrawal of NU from the Masjumi Party

Nahdlatul Ulama's withdrawal from the Masjumi Party in 1952 marked an important milestone in Indonesian politics. And since the Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat was part of the NU, this political event affected the course of Muslimat's development. To draw the significance of this political move, Fealy (1996:21) states that this secession was "the greatest upheaval in Islamic politics of the early 1950s." Scholars of Islamic politics in Indonesia such as Noer consider NU's decision to withdraw from the Masjumi party as demolishing the idea of an Indonesian Muslim community being politically unified. "From that moment the unity of the Indonesian Muslim community became just a dream" (1987:344). However, Noer admits that not only was the NU to blame in this political upheaval. Noer (2003:151) recounts the confession of Jusuf Wibisono, one of Masjumi's leaders of that time, regretting that Masjumi's board refused NU's demand to continue to hold the ministry of religious affairs, though this regret came late, since in 1952 Wibisono did not support the NU candidate.

The contention between the NU and the Masjumi party board started from the Masjumi's Congress in 1949 held in Yogyakarta where young modernists led by Mohammad Natsir took control of the Party Executive. Under their auspice new rules were introduced minimizing the role of Majelis Syuro (Religious Advisory Council) chaired by Wahab Chasbullah, *Rais Am* of the NU and dominated by NU *ulamas*. This later council became a mere advisory body while the politicians (i.e. the Party Executive) took the lead of the party (Boland, 1971: 46; Fealy, 1996:21; Noer, 2003:149). This shift in Majelis Syuro's function, according to Wahid Hasjim (as cited in Boland, 1971: 46), made "the *ulamas*

withdraw and no longer developed their activities in the struggle, because every problem was henceforth considered only from a political point of view, without the guidance of religion”. Furthermore, Wahab Chasbullah considered these actions not only an attempt to marginalize the NU, but was also a personal affront to his authority as the chairman of Majelis Syuro (Fealy, 1996:21).

Another reason of contention was the frequent disputes occurring during party meetings. Modernist speakers often ridiculed the political competence of NU’s *kyai* (religious scholars) leading to a walkout by the latter (Fealy, 1996:21). The following citation exemplifies the type of statement ridiculing the *ulamas* of NU. A Masjumi’s figure have said (as cited in Noer, 1987: 88)

This politics is wide... This is politics, brothers, it cannot be discussed by holding a *tasbih* (rosary), do not even think that the scope of politics merely surrounds the *pondok* and *pesantren* (Muslim boarding school). It spreads to the entire world.

Such feeling of being disrespected was aroused, for instance, when a meeting attended by mixed members— male and female, young and old —was once held. Wahid Hasjim said that in such a mixed meeting, *ulama* delegates were placed to sit together with young men and young women. The revolting thing for those *ulama* was that some of the young women wore short skirts showing the knee. He added, “The meeting had only started in 20 minutes and 60 percent of the *ulama* have left the session” (Sanusi et al., 1985:123).

However, the factor most directly influencing the withdrawal of NU was the conflict that occurred in 1952 over the portfolio of the Minister of Religious Affairs. NU had expected to hold the ministry within the new cabinet to be co-formed by Prawoto Mangkusasmito, one of Masjumi’s leaders, and Sidik Djojokusarto from the Indonesian National Party (PNI). In fact, the ministry had been headed by an NU member in two successive cabinets after Indonesia gained international recognition of its independence. Apparently the Masjumi board refused the demand of NU and that spread disillusionment within members of NU (Fealy, 1996:22). Wahab Chasbullah, *Rais Am* of NU, then without the approval of the NU board, sent a letter to the Masjumi board demanding them to endorse

NU's proposal or NU would consider splitting from the party. About the same moment an interview with Wahab Chasbullah containing a similar demand had been released to the press which infuriated the Masjumi board (Adnan, 1982:24; Fealy, 1996:22-23) The Masjumi board decided finally to refuse NU's demand. They argued that "Masjumi is a unitary party and the criteria for nominating a minister are decided through the discussion among Party leaders. ...Candidates are chosen not because of their membership of 'special member' of Masjumi" (Adnan, 1982:24). The nomination would be, in addition, made by voting (Noer, 1987:85). Finally, K.H. Fakhri Usman from Muhammadiyah won the majority of Masjumi votes and was nominated Minister of Religious Affairs.

The demand of NU to retain the Ministry of Religious Affairs was related to its interest. This department, as Fealy (1996:22-23) argues, "had become NU's stronghold in the bureaucracy and an important source of patronage". It should also be noted that since the Indonesian proclamation of independence in 1945 up to 1952, the ministry was almost always headed by an NU representative. From September 1945 to November 1945, Wahid Hasjim headed this department. During cabinet Syahrir I, this department was headed by H. Rasyidi (Masjumi, non NU). In January 1946, following the first opening of the department, the head was K.H. Fathurrahman (Masjumi, NU) then in July 1947 H Anwaruddin from PSII (Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia) took the head because the Masjumi party refused to take part in Amir Syarifuddin's cabinet. From November 1947 until December 1949, the Religious Affairs Ministry was headed by K.H. Masykur from NU for four different cabinets. In December 1949, when Indonesia adopted a federal system, Wahid Hasjim headed this department (Adnan, 1982:26-27). In 1951, there was considerable animosity caused by Amels, Masjumi non NU, for his part in sacking Wahid from his position based on an allegation of mismanagement about the trip to hajj (Adnan, 1982:45).

All these reasons finally led the NU to decide to withdraw from Masjumi in 1952. In fact, NU was not the first to withdraw. PSII (Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia) had withdrawn from Masjumi in July 1947. The NU council conference held on June 5, 1952 announced the change of NU's character as a

socio religious organisation to become an independent political party. During the nineteenth congress of NU, which was held on April 28 to May 1, 1952 in Palembang, South Sumatra, Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat was granted by NU an autonomous status and changed its name from NU Muslimat to Muslimat NU (Zuhri et al., 1979:80). The name switch might also signal a further independent status of Muslimat NU (Rachman, 2000:266).

Muslimat claimed that the Palembang congress was the fourth congress of Muslimat. The first congress was when the first Muslimat was admitted by NU as part of NU's women section in 1946, followed by the second congress held in 1947 in Madiun, and the congress which took place in Jakarta in May 1950 was regarded as the third congress of Muslimat NU (Zuhri et al., 1979:79).

From Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat to Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama

In addition to granting Muslimat a status of an autonomous body, NU announced its reorganisation from a socioreligious organisation into a political party. Aisjah Dachlan (1955:63), an eye-witness during the congress, commented on “(t)he unusually intensive and poignant agenda”. It was because some participants were “apprehensive about being seen to divide the *umat*” so it would seem that they still disagreed with the NU's estrangement from Masjumi (Fealy, 1996:26-27). After K.H. Wahab Chasbullah's speech convincing the audience of the need for separation from Masjumi and establishment of the NU organisation as an independent political party, the participants finally accepted the estrangement decision made by NU (Fealy, 1996, 25-26)

During its fourth congress, Muslimat NU made several decisions. There was an acknowledgment of the leadership of Mahmudah Mawardi from Surakarta, Central Java, and the appointment of secretaries and treasurers. Muslimat NU approved the proposal to form 'household schools'. It decided further to expand its branches (Dachlan A, 1955:65-66). During this congress Mahmudah Mawardi was the first woman of NU appointed as one of Syuriyah NU members (Noer, 1987:116). Later, two other members of Muslimat were appointed, *Nyai* Fatmah

and *Nyai Choiriyah Hasjim* (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:5). One rare event introduced during the congress was the ‘fancy fair and baby show’, which, according to Aisyah Dachlan, had never happened during previous congresses (1955:63-64).

Muslimat NU as an autonomous body had full independence in managing the organisation, social activities as well as income - generating planning. Decisions made by Muslimat NU need no longer wait for NU’s approval. According to Aisyah Dachlan, the period after which Muslimat gained its independent status was a period of *akil balig* (adult) where they were free to manage their own matters while on the other hand they had to obey the parent organisation as the head of the household (1955:71). For instance, Muslimat NU had to follow NU “in politics and the NU political direction”. Such dependency upon NU was seen later in the Muslimat’s political journey. Another form of its obedience to the parent’s organisation was to move the central board office from Surabaya, East Java, to the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. In 1953, Muslimat NU central board moved to Jakarta in the same year as NU (Dachlan A, 1955:70). As mentioned earlier, the Muslimat board conducted its business from the leader’s house. Such an attitude was again evident when Mahmudah Mawardi was the head of Muslimat NU. In 1954, the central board used her address as the official address (Zuhri et al., 1979:65). Yet, an interesting case similar to this tradition occurred when Khofifah Indar Parawansa built the new office of Muslimat NU close to her house.

A year before the first general elections in 1955, Muslimat NU as well as NU held a congress (Zuhri et al, 1979:63). Many significant decisions were made during the Muslimat NU Congress which to some extent expressed Muslimat NU’s stance on political and gender issues.

The declaration of Muslimat on the child marriage prohibition was yielded to the public in 1954. The reason for exposing that prohibition was based on the increasing number of child marriages which, in Muslimat’s view, often reflected compulsion to which they were vulnerable because of family poverty (Zuhri et al., 1979:63-4). Another decision also related to marriage was the participation of

Muslimat NU in BP4 (Advisory Council for Marriage and Divorce Settlement) which was founded by Mahmudah Mawardi, the head of Muslimat NU, Mrs. Pudjotomo (Muhammadiyah Muslimat) and Nasruddin Latief (head of Religious Affairs of the Jakarta Municipality) (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:71; Vreede-de Stuers, 1960:146, 188). It was mainly concerned with marriage issues where the function of BP4 was a third party.

Muslimat NU also supported women to become members of religious courts with several requirements such as the candidate should be married, she has a broad knowledge about Islamic law, and has good manners (Dachlan A, 1955:68). Another decision was that Muslimat NU requested to LAPUNU (Lajnah Pemilihan Umum Nahdlatul Ulama), a special committee of NU to draw up the party lists of candidates and to prepare for the 1955 elections that women had to be represented as members of parliament at the regional and national levels and to be given priority (Zuhri et al., 1979:64). Muslimat felt that the struggle for women should include equality between men and women in the public domain. These could also be fought for by women themselves and Muslimat could provide the vehicle (Zuhri et al., 1979:64).

Muslimat NU within NU's political party

In order to secure voters, NU released a *fatwa* supporting women's candidature in the 1955 general elections (see NU's *fatwa* in the following section). This might have been an NU strategy to compensate for its lack of cadre with sufficient educational and administrative experience. NU was often denigrated by its opponents because of this lack (Mawardi as cited in Zuhri et al., 1979:169; see also Fealy, 1996:24). After NU agreed to the resolution proposed by Muslimat NU, Muslimat's participation in the political campaign was even greater. Muslimat NU interpreted the *fatwa* as the obligation of both Muslim men and women to flood the House of Representatives and the General Assembly with prominent Muslim people. During her campaign Aisjah Dachlan said (1955:86-87),

The role of women cannot be ignored. Women's vote can determine the victory or the failure of the Muslim group. Why? Because the number of Muslim women, I guess, is higher than that of men. It will be a disappointing if women are not smart to use their political rights. Indonesian Muslims will lose if women are silent.

Another Muslimat leader, Mahmudah Mawardi, said that Muslimat supported the NU party in garnering mass support through *pengajian* and a show of force though with some constraints. She further said that Muslimat had to assist in restoring the value of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* and defending NU to the ultimate degree (as cited in Zuhri et al., 1979:169-70).

It was noted that five candidates of Muslimat NU were among the NU candidates, who were given priority in the party list of candidates such as Asmah Sjachruni from Kalimantan. Her attempts at convincing people of the need for women's representation in the House of Representatives had not been an easy task especially at the province level. During the selection of candidates for the national parliament from South Kalimantan, Asmah affirmed of women's chances of being selected. Reactions in South Kalimantan, however, were varied and tensions often rose when confronted with the possibility of women appearing in the political arena. Soon the issue was referred to the charismatic *ulama* at the provincial level, K.H. Anang Zainal Ilmi, who allegedly had conservative views about women. He approved Asmah's proposal. The reason he gave was that the House of Representatives was not a court (where he did not agree with the role for women) (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:34). Finally Asmah was selected as the woman candidate from South Kalimantan together with the provincial chairperson of Nahdlatul Ulama, and Mohammad Hanafiah, who was the Minister of Agriculture at that time (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:34).

In the first Indonesian general elections held in September 1955, surprisingly NU won 18.4 % of the total legal votes, and lifted its parliamentary representation from a mere 8 while under the Masjumi Party in 1949 to 45 seats (Bruinessen, 1994:69). By comparison, Masjumi gained 20.9 %, and lifted its parliamentary representation from 44 in 1949 to 57 seats. Two other national

parties, PNI (Indonesian National Party) gained 22.3 % (adding 15 more seats in 1955 to hold 57), and PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) 16.4 %. PKI won 39 seats from 17 seats in 1949 (Bruinessen, 1994:69). NU emerged as the third largest party in Indonesia but the result was essentially a moral victory for NU and its affiliates, including Muslimat NU.

Muslimat succeeded in representing women in the House of Representatives. Muslimat NU gained 10 % of NU's total achievement. Five Muslimat NU members were elected to the House of Representatives from four different provinces and branches. Mahmudah Mawardi represented Central Java province, Maryam Kantasumpena represented West Java province, Maryamah Junaidi from Jember, East Java province, Hadiniyah Hadi from Surabaya, East Java province and Asmah Sjachruni from South Kalimantan province (Zuhri et al., 1979:66, interviews Asmah). In fact, NU had a higher proportion of women –all of them from Muslimat NU– than the other two major parties. Women within PNI were five of 57 seats and Masjumi had three of 57 seats. Meanwhile, PKI, the fourth largest party, had the highest proportion of women: five out of 39 seats (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:73).

As well as Muslimat NU's success in gaining the House of Representatives seats, another six members of Muslimat NU were selected as members of the Constituent Assembly at the elections for this chamber in December 1955. They were Solechah Saifuddin Zuhri et al. (Central Java), Adiani Kartodirjo (East Java), Ratu Fatimah (West Java), Abidah Mahfudz (East Java), Nihayah Ma'shum (East Java) and Zamrud Ya'la (South Sulawesi) (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:74).

Soon after the result of the general elections was declared on March 2, 1956, the new cabinet was formed. NU as the third largest political party took five ministries in the new cabinet: the Vice Prime Minister II, the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Economy, the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Religious Affairs (Noer, 1987:250). Moreover, from the first general elections until 1965, the NU party had participated in all cabinets and had a monopoly over the ministerial portfolio of the Ministry for Religion (Abdul Kadir, 1999:146).

Following the quite extraordinary performance of NU (which included Muslimat NU) in the general elections, Muslimat NU joined KOWANI (Kongres Wanita Indonesia), a federation of women's organisations which, in 1956, covered some forty-five nationally based organisations (Zuhri et al., 1979:64, Vreede-de Stuers, 1960:121). One of the requirements to become a member of KOWANI was that the women's organisation should have at least 5 branches in Indonesia and should by its by-laws been struggling for the advancement of Indonesian women. Muslimat NU had similar goals to KOWANI, and had more than 10 branches (Zuhri et al., 1979:64). Thus, Mahmudah Mawardi, representing Muslimat NU, was entrusted as member of the presidium (core members) of KOWANI from 1956-1965.

The presence of Muslimat NU in the political sphere nevertheless gave them the opportunity to be representing all Muslim women in Indonesia. During its representation in the House of Representatives, Muslimat NU played an important role. One of the achievements was Muslimat NU's rejection of the draft of the marriage law initiated by the government in 1957. In collaboration with a representative of Muslimat Masjumi, Mrs. Sunaryo Mangunpuspito, they finally succeeded in having the marriage draft withdrawn, which, in their opinion, contravened Islamic law (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:75). They did not agree with the concept of a secular marriage law.

However the success of Muslimat NU in representing its members in both the House of Representatives and the Constituent Assembly was not considered as a victory for women's representation. As Vreede-de Stuers commented: "It must also be said, that none of the sixteen women elected to parliament was chosen in her capacity as a member of a women's association" (1960:122).

NU's fatwa on the political participation of women

The resolutions proposed by Muslimat NU in its congress were daring decisions since NU was initially depicted as a traditional and orthodox Muslim organisation. It was plausible that NU be regarded as such because its attitude towards Muslim

women had initially proposed limiting women's activities in the public domain. Until the early 1940s, the NU *fatwa* suggested that the necessary place for women was in their home. For example, during the fifteenth NU congress held in Surabaya 1940, one question, which was posed by a male participant about the law relating to women, was when women could pray outside with other women. The answer was that it was *sunnah* (precedent set by the Prophet Muhammad for believers to follow as recorded in the Quran and hadis) for women to pray in *jama'ah* (praying in groups) at their houses and *sunnah* for older women, unfashionable women or beautiful women who were not well - groomed and perfumed (and safe from *fitnah*) to go outside the home for prayer and it was *haram* (unlawful) for attractive women or beautiful women to wear a neat dress and perfume. The reason given was that there would be possible *fitnah* (slander). In addition, women had to have permission from their husbands (Masyhuri, 1997:187).

It might have been the experience during the war that made both men and women within the NU organisation realize that women should be given more opportunities to participate in public life. Vreede-de Stuers (1952:163) says:

The struggle for independence she could rightly call her own, for in it she played a part equal to that of the man. The danger and the suffering of the revolutionary period broke down the barriers which had hitherto "protected" women. Other barriers were to fall in their turn, those which had separated women from each other: regional barriers and those formed by religion and class.

The post-war period indeed gave more opportunities for women to be present in the public domain. In the twenty-second congress held in Surabaya 1954, the NU board through Syuriah (Religious Advisory Council) finally agreed to all proposals put forward by Muslimat NU (Dachlan A, 1955:69).

In 1957, Nahdlatul Ulama reinstated the 1954 *fatwa* relating to NU's permission for women to be members of parliament, during the twenty-third congress of NU. There was a question about women once becoming MPs that they

were obliged to make numerous suggestions addressed to the head of the plenary session, which would sometimes become references for solving important issues. He compared the position of women MPs to the Prophet's *hadits* saying "A nation can never prosper which has assigned its reign to a woman" (Masyhuri, 1997:211). In response, NU delivered a *fatwa* in a rather confusing way by separating the function of making laws (*tsubutu amrin li amrin*) and delivering verdicts (*qadla*). Since the parliamentary office took the first function women might become MPs. However, the *fatwa* mentioned several requirements for women to become MPs such as *afifah* (keeping in dignified manner), having a broad knowledge about social matters, covering the *aurat* (the requirement for Muslim women not to display their sexual charms), having the permission from the authoritative person, safe from *fitnah*, and not becoming the cause for *munkar* (unlawful things). Furthermore, the *fatwa* said that NU had the right to recall female members of NU if they did not fulfil all the requirements (Masyhuri, 1997:211).

Another development for Muslimat NU was that in September 1954 Syuriah NU delivered a decision supporting Muslimat NU's proposal relating to the permission for women to be members of religious courts (Dachlan A, 1955:69). After the general elections, several Muslimat leaders became members of the religious court such as Abidah Maksum, from Jombang, East Java (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:73).

The period of Guided Democracy

The political situation in Indonesia during the 1950s was unstable. This apparently derived from the critical condition of Indonesia following the final acceptance by the Dutch to Indonesian independence in 1949. The Republic of the United States of Indonesia was established under a federal system consisting of the Republic of Indonesia and the 15 small states set up by the Dutch during the previous four years. Such a political structure did not suit most national leaders who strongly advocated the idea of the unity of Indonesia rather than a federal system. Attempts were made to find a better solution and finally national leaders agreed to the new

formation of Indonesia as a Unitary Republic (Noer, 1987:201). Eight months from the date of the agreement signed by both the Dutch and Indonesia concerning the country's status as a federated republic, Indonesian national leaders repudiated the Round Table Conference agreement by dissolving the federal system and establishing a unitary Republic of Indonesia in 1950.

The new system limited the role of both the president and the vice president to merely symbolic heads of state. Meanwhile the bureaucracy was run by the cabinet ministers and appointments were based on their party affiliations. Initially it was called the parliamentary cabinet system (Noer, 1987:201-2). Negotiation among parties sometimes ended in the breaking of the cabinet coalition and the sacking of the cabinet became quite common (Noer, 1987:198). NU was very much part of the government, as I have mentioned, alongside the other three major political parties.

The problem of changing governments was mainly related to the political system where each of the political parties had different ideas. For instance, the new government appointed after the first general elections lasted no more than a year because many political parties were dissatisfied with the policies created by the government. The regular rise and fall of cabinets left little time for the actual conduct of government and, indeed, was strongly resented by many provinces. The more intervention of the president in internal cabinet matters the more resentment was felt against the central government in Jakarta (Noer, 1987:363). The more significant criticism aroused during the 1950s was that too much of the national income was being spent in Java though the outer islands produced more of the natural output than Java. Many of the local army commanders believed that decentralization of the administration was possible without destroying national unity and to some extent it lessened the concentration of political power in Java (Noer, 1987:263; Boland 88). Such accumulation of disappointment towards the national policy triggered some regional provinces, especially those that had more natural resources, to slowly take over the administration from the existing regional governments appointed by central government and had fragmented Indonesian unity (Boland, 1971:88).

The mounting hostility finally reached a critical state and led to further physical conflict after the rebellious groups formed themselves into PRRI Permesta in 1958 in areas of Sulawesi and Sumatra following the failure of negotiations with the central government. The rebellion was headed mostly by the former leaders of the Masjumi party as well as former prime ministers of Indonesia such as Natsir, Syafrudin Prawiranegara, and Boerhanoedin Harahap (Noer, 1987:415). Although strong action was taken by the national army commander which ended with some leaders being arrested, it can be described that the fighting in Sumatra was considered “not too serious” (Boland, 1971:89). Finally, President Soekarno dissolved the biggest Muslim political party, Masjumi, on August 17, 1960 because of its leaders’ role in the 1958 rebellion (Noer, 1987:367).

In 1959, the president declared a State of Emergency following the failure of the agreement between the president and the political parties regarding his proposed new system of polity through his idea of *Konsepsi* which was first published in October 1956 (Boland, 1971:86). This idea would be comprised of all functional groups in society, whose membership would embrace all ideological leanings including the atheistic communist ideology. That proposal was discussed and was at first rejected by the majority of the political parties since it meant that they had to endorse the existing communists. According to Noer (1987:61), many strategies were taken by the government in defending the *Konsepsi* such as the offering of portfolios to the political party leaders and also by intimidation and terror (Noer, 360-61). Such terror actually occurred with the kidnapping of the prominent woman, Maria Ulfah Santoso (former Minister of Social Affairs in the third government and the president of Kowani at the time). In the midst of the uncertainty over *Konsepsi*, Soekarno, supported by the army, on July 5, 1959 suddenly announced a Presidential Decree to dissolve the Constituent Assembly as well as the announcement of the new system of Guided Democracy and the return to the 1945 Constitution (Boland, 1971:99-100).

Muslimat and NU under the Guided Democracy

Following the dissolving of the parliament and the renewal of its name to DPR-GR (Gotong Royong or mutual cooperation parliament), the President began to impose his authority to choose the members of DPR-GR. He, furthermore, imposed his ideology of Nasakom (Nationalist, Religious and Communist) which was previously called *Konsepsi*. The NU party as well as Muslimat were at first reluctant to accept an ideology that might decrease Islamic values or other religious values. However, the majority of NU leaders –headed by K.H. Wahab Chasbullah, *Rais 'Am* of NU– accepted later the president's idea aiming at protecting NU from possible threats of retaliation from Soekarno and the army if NU did not accept the Guided Democracy. In addition, the PKI (communist) factor within Soekarno's ideology threatened NU leaders that without their involvement in politics PKI would seize power (Fealy, 1996:34). NU leaders who used this accommodatory approach were considered as the pragmatists (Fealy, 1996:34).

Another group of NU leaders, 'the hardliners' –headed by K.H. Bisri Syansuri, Vice *Rais 'Am*, according to Fealy (1996:36), were still opposed to Soekarno and forced Syuriyah NU to issue a split decision with regard to the participation in the new parliament. The decision stated that according to Islam such participation was: allowed with intention of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (ordering good and prohibiting evil); disallowed because it entails *ghasab* (arrogation of another's property). Therefore, NU's nominees to the new parliament were free to accept or reject their appointment (Fealy, 1996:36). With regard to this choice Asmah Sjachruni said,

The government had sent an acceptance form to be appointed as members of DPR-GR. I signed that form and I gave it to my brother ordering him to send it to NU's fraction on the condition that Mrs. Wahid Hasjim did the same... Why? If Mrs. Wahid Hasjim who was the daughter of K.H. Bisri [Syansuri] accepted why would I reject? I am a pragmatist and I followed the majority of NU leaders.

The Muslimat NU's representatives followed the accommodatory choice to be appointed in both DPR-GR and MPRS (Provisional National Assembly) from functional groups. From seven women appointed as members of DPR-GR, five were the previously elected women and two members were new: Solichah Wahid Hasjim and Mrs. Munir Munawar. Meanwhile, two Muslimat women were appointed as members of MPRS: Chasanah Mansjur and Aisjah Dachlan (Zuhri et al., 1979:66).

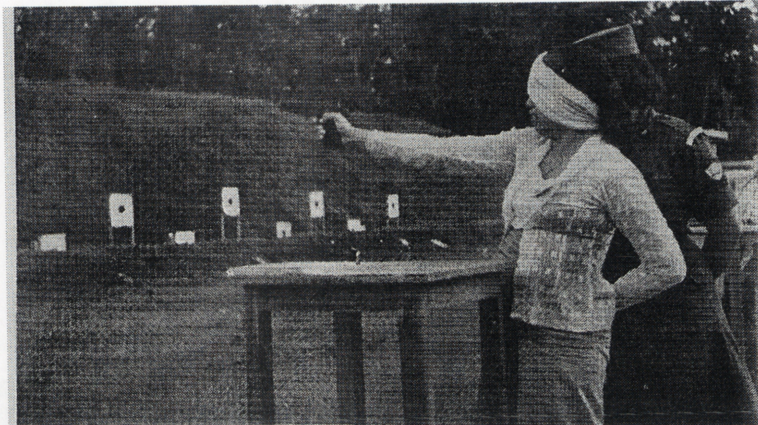
The dissolving of Masjumi in 1960 left NU as the biggest Muslim political party in the 1960s and NU became a critical partner in the newly established government led by President Soekarno (Abdul Kadir, 1999:146). NU filled major posts in both DPR-GR and MPRS as well as many Ministerial portfolios. Muslimat NU as one of NU's supporters benefited from the position of NU at that time especially in expanding the education system and health institutions (Zuhri et al., 1979:88-92).

The Muslimat NU participation in the political arena did not only occur at the national level. In this period, Muslimat NU members were also entrusted to be the leaders of many regional House of Representatives. For instance, Atikah Musaddad was the former vice chairperson of DPRD of the Yogyakarta province (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:74).

The involvement of Muslimat NU in political practice was also demonstrated through its collaboration with the Indonesian military in training for National Defense. In so doing, Muslimat NU was represented by Solichah Wahid Hasjim who became a treasurer of Badan Kerjasama Wanita Militer (Women's Military Collaboration Council) in the 1960s (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:27). In 1964, Muslimat NU held several military training camps for women as a preparation for possible physical conflict following the deterioration of relations between Indonesia and Malaysia (Zuhri et al., 1979:68; Douglas, 1980:166). However, such activities might also be motivated by the fact that the rival organisation, Gerwani, conducted several military trainings for the same purpose (Douglas, 1980:166; Zuhri et al., 1979:6).

Illustration 3: Muslimat NU members joined the voluntary army program, 1964 & 1965

(A woman practiced shooting assisted by a female soldier, 1964)



Sukarelawati Muslimat N.U. angkatan "Dwikora" dalam latihan menembak tepat, Jakarta 1964.

Source: (Zuhri et al., 1979:130)

(A group of Muslimat NU members practiced bearing arm, 1965)



Perjuangan emansipasi kaum wanita. Kader-kader Muslimat NU mengikuti latihan sukarelawati Muslimat NU, 1965.

Source: (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:29)

Chapter four: Muslimat NU under the New Order

The September 1965 event

The participation of Muslimat NU in politics was more apparent during the attempted coup allegedly commanded by PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) aimed at replacing the existing government on September 30, 1965. This attempted coup is commonly known as *peristiwa Gestapu* (The September 30th Movement event). The attempt to seize power resulted in the assassination of six of the top generals of the Indonesian army (cf. Douglas, 1980:169). This assassination marked the beginning of negative views towards women since there was a suspicion that Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement), a women's organisation affiliated to the PKI, played an important role in that event. According to Douglas (1980:169), although the involvement of Gerwani members was not clear and none of the murders can be attributed to specific young women who were present, the Indonesian society has accepted the official view that has associated them with the torture and humiliation of the generals before their deaths. This was supported by the fact that three days prior to this tragic event, a large group of demonstrators, primarily women of Gerwani, took mass action in Surabaya ending in the damage of a house, grounds, and furnishings. This excess justified the claims to the negative stereotype of Gerwani (Douglas, 1980:169). Saskia E. Wieringa in her thesis argued different evidence of Gerwani's role in the attempted coup through the autopsy of the murdered generals which showed that they were not tortured. She went on to argue that the women allegedly involved in the assassination were prostitutes taken from the surrounding streets after the tragic event (Wieringa, 1999:499-507).

On October 2, 1965, two days after the failure of the attempted coup, Muslimat NU announced its resolution condemning PKI as the traitor and asking the government to take action against the perpetrators (Zuhri et al., 1979:68). Still in October, Muslimat NU released another resolution addressed to the Minister of Education and Culture to dissolve the kindergartens formed by Gerwani, Melati, and to be taken over by the government. This resolution was supported by Kowani and was then agreed to by the ministry (Zuhri et al., 1979:69). Muslimat NU was one of the organisations allied to Front Pancasila that declared on October 5, 1965 a statement calling for a ban on the PKI and its affiliated organisations (Zuhri et al., 1979:68). On November 8, 1965, a big rally organised by the women's alliances in the capital city of Front Pancasila demanded the government to dissolve PKI. This protest was led by two prominent Muslim women, Asmah Sjachruni from Muslimat NU and Aruji Kartawinata from PSII (Zuhri et al., 1979:68).

There was another important event related to the September attempted coup which was significant with regard to the relations between Muslimat and NU. Solichah A. Wahid, a Muslimat NU leader, played an important role in the first days of October 1965. Solichah A. Wahid opened her house to NU and nationalist leaders to hold meetings (Baidlowi, 1984:114; Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:127). According to Ma'shum & Zawawi (1996:127), she pushed NU leaders into taking firm action against PKI⁷.

In March 1968, General Soeharto, who was the chief of the army's strategic reserve and had commanded the actions against PKI in the aftermath of the September event, was elected as the new president. Meanwhile Soekarno was sacked and placed under house arrest (Boland, 1971:142). The installation of Soeharto and the success of the military in handling the attempted coup marked

⁷ According to Masbuchin (1967:56), there were three statements of NU regarding the September 1965 event: Subchan ZE's statement on the name of NU Party on October 2 1965 condemning PKI and its involvement in the event; *musyawarah pimpinan's* (leader's meeting) statement on October 2 condemning *Dewan Revolusi* and NU's clearance from its alleged involvement in *Dewan Revolusi* held at Munasit's house in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta, and then reported by Machbub Junaidi to the army's strategic reserve; PBNU's statement on October 5 signed by all autonomous bodies demanding the dissolving of PKI.

the beginning of the military's involvement in Indonesian politics. Soeharto supported by the military formed then a new regime known as the New Order.

The political repression of the New Order

The September 1965 event and the political turmoil which followed (e.g. the ban of PKI and the massacre of its alleged members) marked a massive change for all Indonesian political parties. The New Order regime made an effort to control the instability by imposing certain political repressions. One of its policies was the program of rural depoliticisation commonly called the 'floating mass' doctrine. The New Order, through this doctrine, banned mass organisations in the villages and considered that people's backward was not fit to free political activity (Robinson, 1998:209). Since NU had mainly its mass support from Muslims in the rural areas, NU and other organisations affiliated to NU suffered many political pressures during the New Order.

Another repressive policy which impacted on the political development of Indonesia was the forced 'fusion' of political parties. A year before the elections, the New Order required political parties in DPR GR (Mutual Cooperation Parliament) to group into three different political fractions. On March 13, 1970, NU Party and other Muslim parties grouped under the banner of "*spiritual-materiil*" fraction⁸, that is emphasising spiritual development without neglecting physical development (Aminy, 2004:236). After the 1971 elections, political parties which had already been grouped were required to merge. From ten contestants during the elections, only two were left and Golkar (Golongan Karya or Functional Groups), which at that moment did not want to be considered a political party. On January 5, 1973, NU and other Muslim parties fused to form PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan or United Development Party). Other political parties which had already been grouped under the banner of "*materiil-*

⁸ This fraction grouped NU, Parmusi (Partai Muslimin Indonesia or Indonesian Muslims' Party), PSII (Partai Serikat Islam Indonesia or Indonesian Islamic Union Party) and Perti (Pergerakan Tarbiyah Islamiyah or Movement for Islamic Education), called Persatuan Pembangunan (United Development) (Aminy, 2004:236).

spiritual” fraction⁹, that is emphasising physical development without neglecting spiritual development, fused to form PDI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or Indonesian Democratic Party) (Aminy, 2004:236).

The so-called ‘simplifying political parties’ policy to reduce the number of political parties was more destructive than beneficial for NU. PPP, from where NU Party fused, was the second biggest party after Golkar. As such, the government considered PPP as a political rival. Any critical stance from PPP was perceived as opposition to the government. There were several significant ‘confrontations’ between PPP and the government (Bruinessen, 1994:104-106). For example, in 1973, PPP opposed the draft of the Marriage Law proposed by the government. One controversial article was about the legality of a marriage. The draft mentioned that a marriage could be considered as legal if it was registered. PPP representing the Muslim view opposed this article since it neglected religious regulations on marriage (Aminy, 2004:251). Members of parliament who were originally from the NU Party played a significant role within PPP because they formed the majority. At the moment of fusion they were 58 out of 94 members of PPP or 62 percent of all PPP members.

Having parliamentarians forming an important majority of the opposition led to a deterioration in the relationship between NU and the regime. NU Party, since 1973, did not formally exist anymore because of the fusion. However, the connection between NU, as an influencing social-religious organisation, and PPP was still not clear. Therefore, NU, as a social-religious organisation was identified as the government’s opposition (Abdul Kadir, 1999:176). As a consequence, *ulama* of NU who mostly lived in the rural areas had to face mounting threats and pressures from local state officials. This situation worsened during the 1977 general elections. The New Order regime targeted NU leaders especially in several districts of East and Central Java. They were seriously intimidated by

⁹ This fraction grouped nationalist and Christian parties, including PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia or Indonesian Nationalist Party), Murba (Common-People Party), IPKI (Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia or League of Upholders of Indonesian Independence), Partai Katolik (Catholic Party) and Parkindo (Partai Kristen Indonesia or Indonesian Christian Party), called Demokrasi Pembangunan (Democratic Development), formed on March 9, 1970. It changed to PDI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or Democratic Indonesian Party) on January 10, 1973 (Aminy, 2004:235-236).

using 'horrors or scare-tactics' (Abdul Kadir, 1999:179; Bruinessen, 1994:105). Abdurrahman Wahid described the events as evidence that opposition groups have been little tolerated by the government (as cited in Abdul Kadir, 1999:179). All these repressions, especially during the general elections, led to the decision of several *ulama* to join Golkar on the one hand and on the other hand motivated several younger NU activists to advocate NU leaving the political arena (Abdul Kadir, 1999:180).

The political pressures exerted by the New Order, in addition to the New Order's ideology on women affected Muslimat NU's representation in politics. Only four members of Muslimat NU were elected for the House of Representatives in the 1971 general elections and two members were appointed for the National Assembly (Zuhri et al., 1979:67). During the guided democracy, Muslimat NU was represented by seven members in the DPR GR and two in the National Assembly (MPRS) (Zuhri et al., 1979:65).

The ideology of the New Order on women

The New Order regime, which according to Jackson was "characterized by the decline of political competition and by elimination of groups from the ruling circle" (cited in Blackburn, 1991:31) also affected the state intervening upon women. Oey-Gardiner writes that from the beginning the New Order defined women in the context of national development. It emphasized women's *kodrat* (inherent nature) and nurture as the ideal portrait of women in Indonesia (2002:102). The government emphasized the same ideology when Muslimat NU commemorated its 23rd birthday in March 1969. In her speech, Tien Soeharto, the first lady, said (cited in Zuhri et al., 1979:159)

Let us choose the development sector in which we able to express our women's objectives and conform with our function as wives (*pendamping suami*-standing at the side of their husbands) and mothers who nurture our children...Especially for *kaum ibu* (mother group) who become wives of leaders, they should have to support their husbands to

be more submissive for the society's interest without any *pamrih* (reward).

The word *pamrih* according to Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis (1987:46) is a threat to power, since *pamrih* is the hidden personal motive, which means that doing something not because it has to be done, but because it satisfies personal interest or desires.

In order to confine the women's role as wife and mother, the New Order regime used the atrocities allegedly committed by Gerwani as its main justifying propaganda (Oey-Gardiner, 2002:102). For example, during the meeting of All-Indonesian Congress of Catholic Women in August 1967, the acting President Soeharto mentioned the role of Gerwani in the attempted coup, thus, after his speech, the Congress of Catholic Women made a statement saying that "Political slogans should be abandoned, divisive statements and activities should be eliminated, and deliberations and programs should focus on improvements in social welfare" (Douglas, 1980:179).

In expanding the New Order's ideology on women, it established PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga or Family Welfare Tutorship), Dharma Wanita (civil servants' wives' association), and Dharma Pertiwi (armed forces wives' associations umbrella). These organisations were designed to further their husbands' careers as well as to maintain the government's power over the people (Parawansa, 2002:71; Oey-Gardiner, 2002:102). For instance, the PKK's structure reached village or sub-ward level. In order to influence the society to take part in this organisation, the head of PKK was selected by the state at various levels. At the ward levels, the head of the PKK was the ward chiefs' wife. They were also members of Dharma Wanita because their husbands worked for the civil bureaucracy, whereas their husbands worked for armed services, they were also members of Dharma Pertiwi (Sullivan, 1994:61). According to Sullivan, the PKK ideology has redefined women's place even more narrowly in the domestic sphere while the domestic sphere was associated with home, and the home was misleadingly regarded as 'the arena of national development' (Sullivan, 1994:80).

The state intervention in confining women's roles nevertheless impacted also on Muslimat NU. In addition, as part of NU, Muslimat sometimes carried the burden of the deteriorating relations between NU and the regime, even though Muslimat NU's main programs were focused on socioreligious activities. According to Asmah Sjachruni, Muslimat NU faced the impact of being affiliated with an opposition party during the New Order. She further said (interview),

We as the outsider faced many difficulties because we were members of a political party. Truly, Muslimat was very tired. From the Muslimat Congress held in Surabaya 1967, for twelve years we were paralysed and we could not hold any congress until 1979. It was because of the grouping of Dharma Wanita and Dharma Pertiwi. These organisations took all Muslimat's leaders especially at regional level. Teachers were not allowed to be members of Muslimat, wives of civil servants were not allowed to be members of Muslimat. Wives of civil servants had to join Dharma Wanita, wives of the army forces had to join Dharma Pertiwi, teachers were paralysed...We could not join PKK nor GOW [Gabungan Organisasi Wanita or Association of Women's Organizations]. We were not invited to do courses related to women's career development held by the government.

Such intimidation created a fearful feeling for NU members. Abdul Kadir (1999:186) writes that civil servants who hoped to advance their careers within the bureaucracy stayed away for fear that any association with NU would "led to unwanted reprisals". Intimidation by the regime continued to occur in the minimising the Muslimat NU's institutions. As this was partly the strategy of the regime to reduce the power of NU (considered as an opposition). The regime intervened in property owned by Muslimat such as kindergartens' schools. Khofifah Indar Parawansa in the interview said that during the 1970s several kindergartens' institutions owned by Muslimat NU in Mojokerto, East Java were suddenly taken over by PKK who claimed that the institutions were theirs.

Although Muslimat faced the effects of mounting threats addressed to NU, according to Ma'shum & Zawawi (1996:93), Muslimat NU was fortunate since it did not neglect its important socioreligious activities. They (1996:93) go on to say

“But not like a car, the realisation of those activities could not move quickly”. Muslimat implemented several programs concerning women and children since its beginning. Despite its activity in supporting NU in politics, Muslimat NU’s primary concern was with women’s empowerment, for example the establishment of 19 BKIA (Balai Kesehatan Ibu Anak or clinics for women and children) and two clinics for delivering babies in 1969 (Zuhri et al., 1979:101). Muslimat NU also established several kindergartens and *panti asuhan* (orphanage houses). In 1969, Muslimat NU sent its representative to Pakistan and India under the auspice of LKBN (Lembaga Keluarga Berencana Nasional or National Family Planning Institution, the institution which was established prior the establishment of BKKBN) (Zuhri et al., 1979:115).

NU’s fatwa on family planning

In 1969, Muslimat NU reported its activities on family planning program to Syuriah NU (Supreme Religious Council of NU) and asked the council to release a *fatwa* concerning this program. After the hearing, Syuriah NU indicated its support for the program, though it made several conditions such as that the program had to be a plan to manage the pregnancy. It is not intended to cease nor to abort the pregnancy. It should not become a mass movement. In addition, a wife has to ask permission from her husband first before she followed the program (Zuhri et al., 1979:112). The 25th Congress of NU held in Surabaya December 1971 confirmed the *fatwa* (Zuhri et al., 1979:113).

Following this *fatwa* which permitted and religiously legalised the family planning program, Muslimat NU started to coordinate its activities on this program especially for NU members. The coordination was then conveyed to a foundation called YKM (Yayasan Kesejahteraan Muslimat or Muslimat Welfare Foundation). A circular letter signed by the NU central board in 1974 reconfirmed its support for the program. It stated (as cited in Zuhri et al., 1979:113),

Although the decision of the National Assembly mentions that the program [the family planning program] should be implemented voluntarily, here and there we hear that the voluntary principle was not

respected by agents who directly contacted the people. This forced or semi forced practices resulted in some psychological problems which were not expected. Those negative impacts, in fact, could be avoided if people were first informed and motivated to understand the importance of the Family Planning Program for the national development and for their familial interests, in addition to the disappearance of sinful feeling because of a perception that following the program contradicted the religious teachings.

The circular, further, pointed out that the 1969 *fatwa* of NU could be used to reject such a religious perception. The circular also requested board members of NU at regional level to support Muslimat NU in this program through its foundation.

Muslimat NU later admitted that the Family Planning Program concerned with the people at large (including men and women) and their interests (Zuhri et al., 1979:118). Therefore, Muslimat requested NU to work on the program together. Another possible reason behind this request was the attitude of reluctance to support the program which Muslimat faced in the field from men as the previous circular letter indicated. In addition, the 1969 *fatwa* of NU, which mentioned the permission from the husbands among the conditions for following the program, was used to obstruct women's participation in the program. Yet, Muslimat NU had only influence over the women. In order to maximise the success of the program, Muslimat NU, thus, had to make an alliance with NU. The proposal was accepted by NU and in December 1977 and a new institution called LKKNU (Lembaga Kemaslahatan Keluarga NU or Family Welfare Institution of NU) was then formed. Members of a joint committee were appointed including six men and four women in the core committee (Zuhri et al., 1979:119).

New relations between NU and the New Order regime

The awkward relationship between NU (as well as Muslimat NU) and the regime did not last long. NU made several decisive decisions during its 27th Congress held from December 8 to 12 1984 in Situbondo, East Java (Nakamura, 1996:109).

First, NU accepted Pancasila as the *asas tunggal* (sole foundation) in its by-laws as imposed by the regime on all organisations including political parties. Second, NU restored the primacy of *ulama* leadership by reconfirming the supremacy of Syuriah over Tanfidziah. Third, NU declared openly its withdrawal from ‘practical politics’ by prohibiting the core members of NU boards at all levels to simultaneously hold core positions in any political party (Nakamura, 1996:105-106). A year prior to this Congress, Syuriah NU board held its national meeting in the same place and recommended to all NU members to return to the Khittah NU 1926 (Charter of NU 1926). This call meant that NU started to stay out of politics (Nakamura, 1996:99).

The Situbondo Congress finally marked the beginning of smooth relations between NU including Muslimat NU with the regime. Starting from 1983, the membership and the activities of Muslimat NU increased. Young cadres were no longer afraid to publicly announce their membership of Muslimat NU (Ma’shum & Zawawi, 1996:96). As a women’s socioreligious organisation, Muslimat NU received a lot of benefit from the NU decision, for example Muslimat NU engaged in the government’s programs concerning health issues such as Gerakan Jum’at Bersih (Clean Friday Movement) focusing on clean water sanitation and lavatories (Ma’shum & Zawawi, 1996:51-2). Muslimat NU also started to collaborate with several non-governmental organisations from national and international levels such as Yayasan Melati, UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, as well as with Ministries such as Depnaker (the Ministry of Labour) (Ma’shum & Zawawi, 1996:41).

Muslimat NU also started to engage in various sectors. In the economic sector, it established, for instance, the central co-operative called An-Nisa’ in collaboration with Fatayat NU in 1996. This joint agreement was a further development of already existing co-operatives at regional level. Muslimat NU maintained that in 1996 there were 88 co-operatives run by Muslimat NU regional boards in 11 provinces (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a). These co-operatives included saving and lending co-operatives as well as consumer co-operatives (Rahman, 2000:272). The government through the Ministry of Co-operatives assisted

Muslimat NU's co-operatives by training managerial skill for their staffs and by soft loans (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a).

During this period, Muslimat NU also showed more concern for the development of its members' skills. In fact, Muslimat NU had established from the beginning centres for training in different regions (Rahman, 2000:272). Starting from 1994, it built a representative multi purpose centres. This centre was aimed at training skills (e.g. patisserie, nurseries, Co-operative training), holding meetings (e.g. *istighotsah* or religious mass prayer), etc. It was the Minister of Religious Affairs who laid the first stone and gave initial assistance to the project. The project was lastly assisted to finish by *Mbak* Tutut (Siti Hardijanti Rukmana, Soeharto's daughter) in 1996 when the general chairperson of Muslimat NU joined Golkar (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:60; PP Muslimat NU, 1998:24).

In the religious sector, in addition to its traditional activities such as organising *majlis taklim* (religious study group), Muslimat NU established Yayasan Haji Muslimat NU (Haji Foundation of Muslimat NU) in 1992 (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a). This foundation organises several activities relating to the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca such as publishing guide books, preparing candidates for the hajj rituals, medical check-up's, etc. Muslimat NU has also established relations with several broadcasting services both television and radio, for example, Dialog on Islamic Nuances in Radio Attahiriyah since 1996 (PP Muslimat NU, 1998:16).

Participation of Muslimat NU in politics during this period changed drastically. Based on NU's decision to return to the Khittah 1926, many Muslimat members joined Golkar, the government party, in addition to PPP, the traditional party of Muslimat NU members. In 1996 during Muslimat NU's 50th birthday celebrations attended by 10,000 people, Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, the general chairperson, stated (Kompas Online, 1996)

Muslimat NU emphasizes its commitment to its members for the 1997 elections. It allows its members to independently choose the party

affiliation within the frame of responsible freedom towards the continuity of the national development and responsible toward the God...

She furthermore said, “Muslimat NU encourages people to welcome the 1997 elections. Therefore, people should use their right carefully and avoid *golput* (*golongan putih* or white group who do not vote in the elections)” (Kompas Online, 1996).

This statement of an independent choice was often understood as a campaign for Golkar, since members of Muslimat NU chose traditionally PPP, the political party with whom the NU Party merged in 1973. Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi herself was then selected as a candidate from Golkar in the 1997 elections. This attitude of Muslimat NU of trying to keep the same distance from different political parties or giving an independent choice marked the beginning of the spread of Muslimat NU leaders to different political parties. The 1997 elections resulted on the election of six members of Muslimat NU in DPR, five from PPP and one from Golkar. Nine other members were appointed as members of MPR, seven women from PPP, one woman from Golkar and another woman from *Utusan Daerah* (Regional Representative) (PP Muslimat NU, 1998:5).

Through the growing smooth relations with the state, Muslimat NU expanded its activities in the international fora. Starting from 1986, Muslimat NU sent more regularly its members to international forums which was mostly concerned with social and health issues (Ma’shum & Zawawi, 1996:83-84). In September 1995, Muslimat NU participated in the 4th World Conference on Women. The involvement of Muslimat NU in the international activities slowly motivated Muslimat NU members to reconstruct their relations with NU.

New discourse on women within NU

In November 1997, there was an important *fatwa* delivered by NU that later affected women within NU. Through *bahtsul masail ad-diniyah al-maudlu’iyah* (thematic discussion on religious problems, a regular forum conducted by NU to deliver its *fatwa* on different religious themes), held during the national meeting

of *ulama* in Lombok, NTB, NU delivered a *fatwa* concerning the place of women in Islam. This *fatwa* stated that women are allowed to take part in the national leadership if they fulfilled certain qualifications such as quality, capability, capacity, and acceptability (Sekjen PBNU, 1998:59). Although, this *fatwa* still underlined the natural role of women (*kodrati*) such as first and primary educator for their child, pregnancy, delivering baby, breastfeeding, and other functions within their family, the *fatwa* admitted that the public role of women (*non-kodrati*) have to be clearly respected and protected (Sekjen PBNU, 1998:59). In this meeting two women of NU, Machrusah Taufiq and Najihah Muhtarom involved actively in formulating the *fatwa* and were two out of the eight *tim perumus* (the formulators) (Sekjen PBNU, 1998:60).

This *fatwa* was considered by some people to politically support Mbak Tutut's (Soeharto's daughter) possible candidacy for the national leadership (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:26). The time of its deliverance (November 1997) matched with the period before the election of the President and the Vice President in March 1998. Mbak Tutut was at that time one of leading political figures who had the chance to be elected as the Vice President¹⁰. Days before the *fatwa* was delivered, a meeting attended by 100 *kyai* was held in East Java discussing about a similar issue (Robinson, 2004:187). This argument was never put to the test, but one thing is for sure that both discussions helped to increase the discourse about women's position as a leader and about gender relations within NU. Women's organisations within NU held further discussions concerning gender equity from the Islamic perspective.

International fora and their impact on the New Order

The changing policy of the state toward women such as to the Muslimat NU did not come instantly. Although family and household became the main focus of the state to confining women, the state actively participated in almost all international forums of women held by the UN that initially discussed more about the role of

¹⁰ Lastly Mbak Tutut was not selected by Golkar, the ruling party to run with her father. The honour went to BJ Habibie who then became the third President of Indonesia.

women in the public sphere, for example the establishment of the Ministry for the Role of Women in 1978, following the UN declaration of the Decade for Women (1975-85). In the 1983 and 1987 Broad Guidelines on State Policy (GBHN) the government took the broader meaning of women's responsibilities which was to manage their *peran ganda* (dual role) where women despite their duty to manage their family household, were also to build their potential in the economic and political arena (Oey-Gardiner, 2002:103). In extending the state's policy, the government formed P2WKSS (Teams for Uplifting the Status of Women through Healthy and Prosperous Family) at regional levels (Soetjipto, 2000:71). Along with that, the government through the State Ministry of the Women's Role formed the PSW (Center for Women Studies) in several public and private universities.

The government's support for the modification of the role of women was even developed further after it ratified several other conventions on women. The government ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Law No. 7/1984). In the 1993 GBHN (broad guidelines on state policy) the government emphasized women's role as *mitra sejajar* (gender equity). The government confirmed women's role as equal to the male and stated that development should be broadened as long as women retained their women's *kodrat* (women's nature), *harkat* (dignity), and *martabat* (prestige) (Soetjipto, 2000:72). In 1998, following the downfall of former President Soeharto on May, the government under President Habibie released the Presidential Decree 181/1998 with the reference to the Women's convention which was implemented in the establishment of a National Commission on Violence against Women on July 15, 1998 (Parnohadiningrat, 2002:xxiii).

From the period of the New Order, one thing that can be pointed out is that the repressive regime of the New Order affected all areas of Indonesian society. NU as one of the social organizations regarded as an opponent of the New Order, felt the detrimental effect of state policy. As Muslimat NU was the supporter of NU in politics, the awkward relations between NU and the state impacted on Muslimat NU as well. Through the restrictive position of women by the state,

Muslimat NU was also forced to avoid political discourse and focus more on family matters.

The engagement of the state with the international convention to reconsider its definition about the role of women was justified as the regime's strategy to "legitimise its authoritarian power" (Robinson, 1998:205). To end this chapter, Robinson's question is interesting, "Would gender equity, or women's rights in general, have got onto the public agenda of New Order Indonesia at all without this externally originated push?" (1998:217).

Illustration 4: Orientation about the Family Planning program organised by Muslimat NU, 1972 & 1979

(Mixed meeting of the opening)



Pembukaan Pekan Orientasi K.B./Pendidikan Kependudukan di Jakarta (Mei 1979).

(Unveiled young women in the reception desk. Sinta Nuriyah sat on the extreme left while Farida Saifuddin Zuhri stood on the extreme right)



Pagi-pagi para penerima tamu telah siap di tempat Orientasi K.B. se Jawa, Madura dan Bali (Jakarta Juli 1972).

Source: (Zuhri et al., 1979:129)

Chapter five: Muslimat NU and new (renewed) discourses in the period of political reform

The fall of Soeharto and the emergence of new (renewed) discourses

Following the downfall of the New Order regime under Soeharto in 1998, Indonesia entered a new era called *era reformasi* (reform era). This *reformasi* brought about the essential change to the opening up of Indonesian democracy. Habibie, who succeeded Soeharto as the President of Indonesia in 1998, called for legislative reform. Several important laws such as a set of three Laws on Politics (No. 2/1999, 3/1999 and 4/1999) were enacted during his short presidency (Aminy, 2004:334-335). Under these new laws 48 political parties (including the three old parties) were qualified to participate in the 1999 elections. Moreover, Law No. 4/1999 reduced to half the number of MPs appointed from the military from 75 to 38. The democratic election of K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, former general chairperson of Tanfidziyah NU, as the new President of Indonesia by the National Assembly in October 1999 showed that the democracy within Indonesian political system had really started to be implemented.

The initial discourse of *anti-KKN* (corruption, collusion and nepotism), which emerged at the beginning of this period of transition, was followed by other discourses with less interventions from the authority. Freedom of exposing different opinions as well as asking for more rights emerged in daily discussions in the media. New policies on mass media and the new law on press freedom enacted during Habibie's presidency went hand in hand with this freedom of expression. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's short presidency was marked by another step towards a free press when he abolished the Ministry of Information, an organ which censored and banned many newspapers and magazines during the New Order.

This period of transition also provided a momentum for overtly criticizing the New Order political machinery in limiting and exploiting women's participation in social and political life. Women were often projected as wives and mothers in order to support Indonesian development (Parawansa, 2002:70-71). Another female activist, Arivia (1999:5) says that during the New Order women's orientation was to support the physical development of Indonesia. It was never directed to develop women's personal enrichment. In addition, the idea that women's social participation was restricted to the domestic sphere, as part of the assertion of *asas kekeluargaan* (the 'family principle') was promoted by the New Order and was considered as fundamental to the Indonesian-style of 'democracy' (Robinson, 1998:205).

When women's political participation increased they were exploited in order to maintain the status quo. As argued by Asmah Sjachruni, former member of parliament from Muslimat NU (interview),

The bigger percentage of women in the parliament during the New Order was not based on quality rather it was based on power. There were agreed proportions how many seats for wives of governors, how many percentages for wives of military district commandants in the general assembly (MPR). Thus, it has been reached because of the authority's facilities in order to back up the regime.

Ani W. Soetjipto maintains that women's political recruitment was mainly aimed at supporting the profession and position of their husbands (Soetjipto, 2000:295)¹¹. In contrast, in the same period, Muslimat NU offered women a way to be politically active in their own right.

¹¹ There were also other motivations such as the prestige of being a parliamentarian and the financial rewards. However, from Taju & Dewanto's book (1997) based on interviews of women parliamentarians in the 1992-1997 session, the prestige factor was clearer than other factors. For example, a parliamentarian said "Entering the House of Representatives at that moment was amazing (*weeeh...!*). Moreover, when she was elected and really works in the house it is marvellous (*wuaaah...!*)" (Taju & Dewanto, 1997:44). A confession of a parliamentarian such as "If the salary is not increased, it does not matter. The previous salary, I think, was quite big" (Taju & Dewanto, 1997:87) indicates that financial reward was another motivation. Some interviews express, further, that corruption opportunities were open by being a parliamentarian such as "Before someone was an ordinary businessperson. After being in the House of Representatives the

Another issue that was rarely discussed during the New Order era is Law No. 1/1974 on Marriage and PP 10/1983 (Government Regulation) which made polygamy difficult. Debate about polygamy itself is not new, but soon after the beginning of the *reformasi* era it became daily conversation and was no longer viewed as a taboo issue (Gatra, 2003). This issue was firstly re-exposed by Puspo Wardoyo, a successful restaurant chain owner in Central Java who in 1999 began to campaign about the positive sides of polygamy. He himself had practiced polygamy since 1990. On the other hand, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the State Minister of Women's Empowerment, asked to review Law No. 1/1974 and PP 10/1983 which she considered were no longer relevant (Gatra, 2003). She furthermore said that PP 45/1990 which is the revised regulation of PP 10/1983 (but less known) contains gender-biased rules on the ground that the penalty of male civil servants who do polygamy is softer than that of female civil servants who become the second wives (interview; Gatra, 2003).

Two important issues will be discussed in this chapter, namely the political participation of women, particularly the 30 percent quota for women in the parliament and the debate around polygamy. These issues relate closely to the new political climate of *reformasi* and also to new negotiations of gender relations between Muslimat and NU. These issues were discussed with Muslimat NU members that I interviewed. In this regard, a general account of the interview subjects follows.

General account of the interviewees

During the research, I interviewed eleven women, all prominent members of Muslimat NU. The majority are politicians, parliamentarians and a former minister. They are –sorted alphabetically by their first name– Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, Anisah Mahfudz, Asmah Sjachruni, Ermalena Mhs, Ida Fauziyah, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Lathifah Hasyim, Ratu Dian Hatifah, Sinta Nuriyah

businessperson wants to become a conglomerate” (Taju & Dewanto, 1997:131). But it is not clear whether this practice applies to women parliamentarians.

Abdurrahman Wahid, Umroh Machfudzoh Tolchah Mansur, Zunatul Mafruchah. The following is a general account of those interviewees.

First, all interviewees have been members of one or more of the autonomous organisations within NU and had held different positions (see Diagram 1). This fact conveys a strong impression that being an activist of an organisation is a 'mandatory' criterion for becoming a politician. Marwah Daud Ibrahim (1997:XVI) made a similar observation about female members of parliament in the 1992-1997 session. It indicates also that different organisations within NU function to produce political cadres as well as being social organisations, although the New Order regime virtually prohibited political activities of such organisations. The fall of Soeharto in 1998 increased the demand for 'ready' people (i.e. selected by members, having held different positions, and having had experience in organising people) from such organisations by new political parties especially PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa or National Awakening Party) formed by NU's leaders. In addition, active members of those organisations are often well known people within their community, a quality which is needed in order to attract mass electoral support.

Second, the majority of interviewees have studied in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) or have a degree from IAIN (State Institute for Islamic Studies) or have passed through dual education (religious and public education). This characteristic influences their behaviour including their political behaviour. The case of Khofifah Indar Parawansa and Ida Fauziyah (see their profile in the appendix) when they meet their seniors (*kyai* or *nyai*, male or female religious leader) revealed how deep the *pesantren* model of education influences their behaviour. Khofifah admits that she cannot in practice refuse requests of *kyai*, while Ida always kisses the hand of her senior, a common tradition within *pesantren*.

Third, the majority of interviewees are descendants or relatives of *kyai* or *nyai* or what Bruinessen (1994:154) refers to as members of the 'NU elite' (see Diagram 3). Bruinessen describes the 'NU elite' as a relatively small group of *kyai* families who manage big *pesantren* and they are connected to each other by

marriages or teacher-student relations. Within this elite group, relatives of *pesantren* of Jombang hold dominant roles (1994:154). Although Bruinessen discusses NU, a similar pattern emerges in Muslimat NU. *Kyai* families of Jombang are dominant in Muslimat NU's structure. However, if the case of Muslimat is compared to NU, Muslimat NU is much more open. From its first establishment, Muslimat NU knows of only five chairpersons within whom only one is directly linked to Jombang *kyai* families (i.e. Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi). Moreover, two of those five chairpersons defeated their opponents in an internal election, even though the latter were directly linked to the 'NU elite'. I refer to the case of Asmah Sjachruni who defeated Solichah Wahid (daughter of K.H. Bisyr Syansuri) and Solechah Saifuddin Zuhri (wife of a former Minister of Religious Affairs) in 1979 and to the case of Khofifah Indar Parawansa who defeated Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi (daughter of K.H.A. Wahid Hasjim) in 2000.

Fourth, the majority of interviewees are Javanese. In fact Javanese (including Maduranese) people are dominant members of Muslimat as well as NU. For instance, 42 out of 52 members of parliament (2004-2009 session) from PKB, the closest political party to NU, were elected from East Java, Central Java, and Yogyakarta. That means about 81 percent of parliamentarians from PKB are Javanese. According to Bruinessen (1994:151), the Javanese dominance in NU has given rise to some tension between Javanese and non-Javanese members. However, such tensions are not evident in Muslimat NU. Even more, non-Javanese members sometimes are appreciated because of their cultural background. For instance, Khofifah Indar Parawansa appreciates her predecessor Asmah Sjachruni who is from South Kalimantan for defending Muslimat's interests vis-à-vis NU with her flexible ways. Khofifah argues further that Asmah Sjachruni "is an NU female figure from outside Java, so that she can freely and flexibly confront feudalistic Javanese culture especially that of *kyai*" (2002:144).

The quota system for women's better representation

At the beginning of the *reformasi* era women as well as the Indonesian society at large expected that political reform would increase essentially and significantly

their political participation. In December 1998, KPI (Indonesian Women’s Coalition) organised the Women’s Congress for the specific purposes of pressuring gender mainstreaming in politics, preparing a platform for justice and democracy, and implementing a joint intent. At the Congress many young participants had already voiced for a quota of 30 percent for women’s participation (Bianpoen, 2000:292-293). While the civil society has benefited from the reform, women on the other hand have suffered a poor result on their representation in the 1999 elections. In these elections women gained only 9 percent of seats in the national parliament (45 members). The number of women was, in fact, in decline over four general elections. In 1987 women held 13 percent of the seats in the national parliament, their numbers decreasing to 12.4 percent (62 members) in 1992 and 10.8 percent (54 members) in the 1997 general elections (see Chart 3) (CETRO, 2001). Compared to neighbouring countries such as Malaysia with 10.5 percent (elected 1999), the Philippines 17.8 percent (elected 2001) and Vietnam with 27.3 percent (elected 2002), Indonesian women were less represented (Wijaksana, 2004:93) though Indonesian women were still better represented compared to the majority Muslim countries (Robinson, 2004:188).

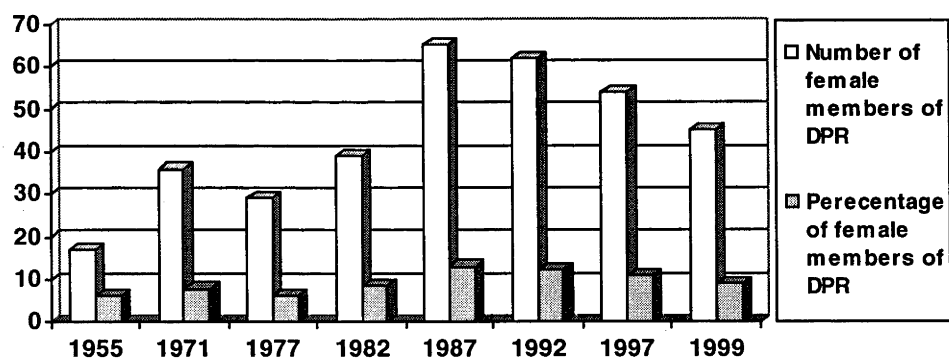


Chart 3: Number of female members of DPR from 1955 to 2004 and their percentage (source: CETRO [nd. 2001])

The result has made women realise that euphoric sentiments were not enough. Laws and regulations which guarantee the increase of women’s political participation have to be enacted. One of the strategies is an affirmative action policy that should be first embraced by the state. This policy is one of several

recommendations of the UN Fourth World Conference for Women held in Beijing September 1995. Indonesia has participated and endorsed the Beijing recommendations (Parawansa, 2001:71). Nevertheless, the everlasting propaganda of governments to superimpose the ideal of women as *mitra sejajar* (equal partners) in development with the remained male-biased concepts of women, such as women's *kodrat* (nature), *harkat* (dignity) and *martabat* (status) (Oey-Gardiner, 2002:103), impacted on the invisibility of women in the public sphere.

About the year 2000, the State Ministry for Women's Empowerment headed by Khofifah Indar Parawansa, proposed a quota of 30 percent for women in the top two echelons of the bureaucracy and in the legislature. The same quota was proposed for the recruitment of civil and military leaders (Parawansa, 2001:76). But the nominal proposed 30 percent was a revised idea as admitted by Khofifah (interview) "I was rather conservative by asking only 20 percent at first. Soon after, when I considered the reality faced by women I decided to raise it by ten per cent for women's representation in political life". Furthermore, at a workshop organised by CETRO in April 2001, the Ministry reconfirmed its support for a quota system which is a necessary strategy to increase the number of women in the legislatures. At this workshop an agreement also emerged from several organisations including the Indonesian Women's Political Caucus within parliament and women activists that political parties should be lobbied to support this system, though there were debates about the percentage and how the quota would be applied (Bessell, 2004).

The struggle for a quota system moved then to the national parliament. In July 2002, KPPI (Caucus of Indonesian Women Parliamentarians) held a workshop seminar to discuss women's participation in politics. The objective of the workshop was to revise three laws on politics (Aminy, 2004:369). However, passing laws which mentions the quota for women was hard. Many political parties were reluctant to accept the 30 percent quota for women when discussing the drafts of law on politics proposed by the government between September 2002 and February 2003. At first, only PKB and Golkar proposed the quota system for women in their DIM (list of important matters) (Kompas, 2002). The obstacles

mainly came from male members and the government. The failure to enter the quota system in Law No. 31/2002 on Political Parties enacted in November 2002 was followed by more women's protests and rallies (Parawansa, interview). Lastly Law No. 12/2003 on the Election enacted in February 2003 mentions that political parties should list 30 percent female candidates for the 2004 general elections.

The idea of affirmative action and quotas within the NU circle

An affirmative action statement was also introduced during NU's thirtieth Congress held in Pesantren Lirboyo, Kediri, East Java, in 1999. Among *Masail Diniyah al Maudlu'iyah* (i.e. thematic discussion on religious problems which is regularly held during the NU congress) there was a *fatwa* supporting affirmative action entitled *Islam dan Kesetaraan Gender* (Islam and gender equality). In this *fatwa* NU was critical with regard to three main areas that isolated women from the public domain, namely the theological interpretation, the culture of patriarchy and the political discrimination (Sekjen PBNU, 1999:55-56).

The *fatwa* proposed, therefore, solutions to all three. First, it encouraged reviewing some gender-biased theological interpretations by using historical, sociological and anthropological approaches to the religious texts. For instance, women have the right of public leadership as well as men, thus, the phrase *qawwamuna 'alan nisa'* in the Quran (4:34) –yet still interpreted as men being leaders upon women– has to be put in terms of domestic relations and cannot be used to hinder women's rights to hold public positions (Sekjen PBNU, 1999:57).

Second, the *fatwa* promoted critical thinking towards patriarchal cultures which are embodied in the religion. It admits that the leadership is no longer a matter of private leadership (*az-za'amah asy-syakhsyiyah*), that is, that leadership in the modern society has changed from someone's personal charisma such as chief of a tribe, to the collective leadership within an institution (*nidzam* or system) (Sekjen PBNU, 1999:58-59).

Third, the *fatwa* states that political practices which discriminate against women must be changed. The democratic system of politics should be

implemented through the development of five principles such as equality (*musawah*), justice (*adalah*), freedom (*hurriyah*), exclusion of the use of force/non violence, and capability (*al-qudrah*) in politics. An affirmative action policy should be taken in order to make women more visible and better represented in decision-making positions such as in both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly (Sekjen PBNU, 2000:60).

In the year 2000, Muslimat NU during its fourteenth Congress in Jakarta made a firmer recommendation regarding affirmative action. In article 7 (political recommendations), Muslimat NU projected a 30 percent quota for women to be established for both Legislative and Executive as an implementation of *semangat dan jiwa reformasi* (spirit and soul of reform) (PP Muslimat NU, 2000b:65). Muslimat NU can be considered one of the first organisations to voice the 30 percent quota.

The quota is actually a new discourse introduced within and by Muslimat NU in the period of reform. During the New Order regime, Muslimat NU focused on more social and humanity activities rather than on political practices. Since the downfall of Soeharto, Muslimat NU has increased its concerns with politics. It conducted voters' education programs together with other female organisations within NU (Fatayat NU and IPPNU), on the eve of the 1999 elections (Munir et al., 1999; PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:31-32). This political education was in parallel with the UN policy to pay more attention to the Indonesian general elections of 1999 which could be manipulated by the disgruntled elements of the ousted New Order regime.

Slowly, the affirmative action and the quota system also become an important subject of discourse within PKB. Ida Fauziah, a member of Muslimat NU and member of parliament from PKB, said that PKB during its *Musyawarah Luar Biasa* (Extraordinary Congress) held in Yogyakarta 2001 recommended affirmative action through a quota for women in politics (interview).

Interviewees' responses to the quota system

All of the interviewees agreed that more participation of women in politics is necessary. Some of the arguments reflect their deep consciousness of this necessity. For instance, Ermalena during the interview said,

I believe that if the concept of a balanced percentage regarding the sex is not applied the decision taken will be biased since at a certain point the ego of women and that of men would appear. There would be an unconscious reaction of women's needs and those of men. What we see now is men's needs because they know what they need. Women's needs are neglected and not adopted in the process of enacting laws.

She gave, furthermore, a simple example which shows the negligence of women's needs.

Women are not involved in how spaces of a house are distributed, although the house is a domestic area where women participate more. Where should the bed rooms be and where should the kitchen be, so that women could easily manage the household? This is not even thought about.

Some others rely on a more formal argument. Lathifah Hasyim in the interview, for instance, said that women's organisations started to move in the aftermath of the Beijing Conference. "The 2000 Muslimat NU congress which demanded a 30 percent allocation for women in the legislative and executive bodies took the Beijing Conference as reference".

The debate about better participation of women has been argued by some interviewees since the 1950s though in a persuasive way. According to Asmah Sjachruni, women were often described as the left wing during the period of the 'Old Order'. Based on this perception of women she tried to empower women's role as she said in the interview,

It's okay that we are the left wing. But for a bird or a plane the left has to be the same as the right wing in their power. A bird could not fly with the

paralysed left wing. So, the right and left wing have to be both powerful. This response was developed and it should be discussed by Muslimat within the NU.

This argument encouraged Asmah Sjachruni to further propose the concept of ‘priority arrangement’, as well as a woman being chosen as member of the committee which drew up the candidature list. She said,

In a congress we proposed to the NU Party the priority arrangement that meant that the first and second candidate should be from the NU and the third should be from Muslimat in order to empower the left wing. For instance, if we predicted four winning seats here, the first candidate from the NU, the second from Muslimat and the third and fourth from the NU and the Ansor and so on. We demanded also that at least one woman had to become a member of committee which drew up the list of candidates. I was chosen to represent Muslimat of all Kalimantan.

Her idea was accepted by the NU party board of South Kalimantan, and she, thus, was selected to be the second candidate behind the provincial chairperson of NU South Kalimantan. However, she was then moved to the third position when the list arrived in Jakarta. She criticised this change but finally she had to accept the NU central board decision (see also Helmy & Ma’shum, 2002:34-35).

Interviewees are also aware that the majority of men are reluctant to accept more women to participate in politics. Interviewees often used the religious term “*tidak ikhlas*” (insincerity, do not surrender) to describe men’s attitude toward this issue. For instance, Lathifah Hasyim said,

Like today, we have a chance to put our candidate from Muslimat for Dewan Perwakilan Daerah (i.e. Regional Representative Council) without passing by political parties. Although NU has already had men in politics [as MPs], many of NU’s members still want to put forward their candidature. They were not really sincere (*ikhlas*) in giving up to Muslimat.

Asmah Sjachruni, another interviewee, expressed a similar experience. “That is the reality. Men do not sincerely accept the gender equality”. Along with the term “*tidak ikhlas*” a softer expression “*tidak tega*” (do not have the nerve) was also used. Aisyah Baidlowi, for instance, said “Men do not have the nerve to allow women to participate in politics”. Meanwhile some interviewees expressed themselves in a more frank way. Ratu Dian Hatifah said “It is hard to pass through those barriers even though we have struggled, men as a group do not appreciate (*tidak welcome*)”. Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid stated that “In fact, we can satisfy that requirement, providing 30 percent of candidates with acceptable quality. However, men still wedge (*mengganjal*) women”.

Although all interviewees agreed about the importance of more women’s participation in politics and they are aware of men’s unwillingness to concede, they are slightly divided vis-à-vis the quota policy. The majority supported this policy and some others reserved their judgement. Supporters of the quota policy argue that without any political pressure, men tend to persist in their attitude. For instance, Ratu Dian Hatifah said, “Without any pressure from the law men think that we are just playing. Under the pressure of law we are serious, men are serious and the government is also serious [to apply the quota]”. The embarrassment also plays an important role in pressuring men. Khofifah Indar Parawansa said, “They will feel shame if they are perceived as gender insensitive. This feeling makes a big influence”. In addition, she said that the implementation of a quota policy has to be maintained until there is no more doubt that women’s political participation is assured.

Anisah Mahfudz, another supporter of the quota policy, bases her argument on two reasons. The first is related to the idea of democracy. She said, “The democratic system is based on representativeness. You know that half of the worldwide citizens are women, so their representatives have to meet their percentage”. The second is related to power. She said, “Many women’s problems are not accommodated by policy makers such as violence against women, gender inequalities, etc ... because few women hold decision-making positions. However, if a female in a decision-making position is powerful she can influence the floor”.

Anisah Mahfudz further admits that men who are gender sensitive can accommodate the second reason. However, women representatives have to reach first the critical percentage, so they can always remind policy makers to pay attention to women's issues.

Umroh Machfudzoh also argues on the power reason. Since all heads of political parties are men, as she said, "Many times we see that women's political participation depends on the leaders. This has to change". She further argues that women's participation in the political domain is part of their religious duties. She said, "My argument is *Wal mu'minuna wal mu'minat ba'dluhum auliyau ba'dlin. Ya'muruna bil ma'ruf wa yanhauna 'anil munkar*". This quotation is part of a verse in the Quran (9:71) meaning "Faithful men and faithful women, part of them, are guide to each other. They order what is just and forbid what is evil". Based on this verse Umroh Machfudzoh concludes that part of Muslim men as well as Muslim women have the same responsibility and that is to find out what are *munkar* (evil doings) in the society in order to forbid them and what are *ma'ruf* (just doings) in order to command them. All aspects of life in this world, in fact, may contain just and evil. Therefore, women have to participate in all aspects of life as well as men. Women deserve demanding the quota policy to be implemented, even as she said, "the percentage should be increased", if the system hinders women to fulfil this religious duty.

Khofifah Indar Parawansa argues that women have to be supported by the quota system since women carry a big burden at home which obstructs them from greater access, financial support, and making networks. In the interview she gave an example,

If they (i.e. women) have a baby and do not possess a car, without a driver, a maid at home, how can they make networks? The same thing may happen to men, but they still can attend a seminar until 5 pm. At home all have been prepared foods, children have already taken shower. This big burden obstructs women if they want to develop outside access, communicate with constituents, etc.

The small percentage which is traditionally 'reserved' for women in politics makes the competition between women themselves unfairly done. Ratu Dian Hatifah based on her experience, for instance, commented, "Women politicians are more unkind" than men. Furthermore, she compared between women's behaviour and men's behaviour in politics. According to her, men tend to pardon more easily than women do. A conflict with another member of PKB, her previous party, made her decide to move with the assistance of her brother to Golkar. To avoid a similar experience she chose research and development division within Golkar where women are less. Khofifah Indar Parawansa also underlined the problem, "Competition between candidates especially women is not well since that part of the "cake" which is distributed is small" (Kompas, 2003).

During the interviews, some interviewees told about their experience in passing the Law mentioning the quota. Ida Fauziyah told about the internal process within PKB,

There was not any quota in the government's draft. At that time, I made a sounding on my colleagues in the party and made approaches to them about the issue ... In fact, the quota is a mandate of the Party implementing a recommendation of the extraordinary congress. But, if no one keeps an on it, it can disappear. Usually, one who keeps an eye on such recommendation can decide in plenty on it. So, I typed the DIM by myself. Then, I brought it to my colleagues. "How many percentages do you put? 15?" asked a colleague. "No, at least 20 percent, but the critical point is 30 percent". I proposed the minimum since many NGOs and CETRO said that 20 percent is already good. We can correct that at the following elections.

She went on to say that many of her male colleagues were critical about the percentage. They were not sure that PKB could provide enough qualified women to be selected. As the general chairperson of PPKB (women's wing of PKB) she insisted that there are enough qualified women. Though she was not chosen as a member of *pansus* (special committee) for discussing Laws on Politics, she

maintained that the issue of quota could pass –at the party level– because when the DIM has already been internally agreed upon it becomes the party policy which every member has to defend.

Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi on the other hand reported how the quota system was defended in the parliament's discussions. She said,

In discussions about the affirmative action we always took as reference the United Nations' convention on the abolition of all discriminations against women, the origin of the affirmative action idea. We emphasized this convention to *bapak-bapak* (men). If we only argued that there is a different starting point between men and women in political participation they would not accept. However, when we talked about the world and our global interests they started to accept.

Some other interviewees who make reserve about the quota system argue that it can negatively impact on the quality of women's selection. Asmah Sjachruni said,

The importance is not just to fulfil the 30 percent quota, but to really reach gender equality. Do you think with the current situation, candidature filled with intrigues, particularly with money, we can recruit qualified women? I am afraid that only wealthy women are selected and get winning seats.

Ermalena also expressed her fear of the negative impacts of the quota system though she believes in the importance of affirmative action.

The state should systematically prepare political spaces for women. Women have to be facilitated. But this does not happen, so what is the solution? Setting a quota system. Thus, the responsibility of the state comes next. I think it should be otherwise. The state must understand that women's participation is worthy for national development. The quota is a forced measure, a final alternative. As such, it produces dilemma. If we research on women joining political parties, we will find their configuration. Like this and that (i.e. not a happy one).

Zunatul Mafruchah does not agree with the principle of quota which places an artificial limit on women's political participation and their capacity. According to her, women have to be represented equally and the mentioned percentage carries with it, though without negative intention, an unfair portion of women's participation. People may be used to that and think that women's capacity in politics is limited at that percentage. In addition, men will have another argument to trivialise women if they cannot fulfil the percentage, though this is not their fault. According to her, there are a lot of social as well as legal problems faced by women which obstruct their participation. She prefers that people work first to eliminate regulations which are discriminative toward women before setting the quota. She further maintains that in a fair competition, some women's qualities such as their ability in negotiation are good capitals for the political contest.

Discourse on polygamy

The discourse around polygamy became once again a popular one since 1999 at the beginning of the reform period. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the discourse around polygamy was introduced by a successful restaurant chain owner Puspo Wardoyo who has four wives. He claimed that polygamy is good and it does not contravene Islamic teachings. In order to promote polygamy he further founded a family consultant office called BKKSP (Keluarga Sakinah dan Poligami or harmonious family and polygamy) located in a special room of a five star hotel in Surakarta, Central Java. According his office there were more than 100 women on a list of widows and young women who were ready to be married as the second, third or fourth wives (Gatra, 2003). Moreover he introduced names for his restaurant menus using words associated with polygamy such as polygamy juice which contains four tropical fruits.

The Persis' (United Islam) statement demanding the government to withdraw the Government Regulation No. 10 of 1983 (PP 10/1983) revived the discussion. (Nurohmah, 2004:32). The PP 10/1983, in fact, regulated male public servants when thinking about taking a second wife. They have to fulfill complicated procedures including permission from the first wife. According to

Muslimat, a demand to review PP 10/1983 was also stated by NU during its thirtieth congress held in Kediri, East Java, in 1999 (Thohir, [nd. 2001]:66). The misunderstood positive response from Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the Minister for Women's Empowerment at that time, to review some regulations related to marriage was strongly resented among women (Nurohmah, 2004:32). In fact, Khofifah (interview) was positive about reviewing these regulations especially the Government Regulation No. 45 of 1990 (PP 45/1990) which was discriminative against women. For instance, a male public servant who does not fulfill conditions for taking a second wife will be sanctioned. On the other hand a female public servant who accepts being the second wife will be fired. During the interview Khofifah said that while she was the State Minister she had to face this problem when she was asked to sign a decree firing a female public servant because of this issue. This experience raised her concern about the discriminative aspects of PP 45/1990.

The debates on polygamy heated up from 2001 during Megawati's presidency since her Vice President Hamzah Haz has more than one wife. Even worse Hamzah Haz took his third wife in 2002 while the Vice President (Gatra, 2003). An award called "Polygamy Award" sponsored by Puspo Wardoyo mid 2003 ceremonied in a five-star hotel kept the controversy alive. Puspo Wardoyo handed out trophies to several winners. The Vice President Hamzah Haz was one of the nominated winners. However he did not attend the party (Mapes, 2003).

The issue of polygamy attracted more pros and contras among Indonesian Muslims. Puspo Wardoyo, for instance, often cited a Quranic verse mentioning the permission for Muslim men to marry more than one wife. He went on to say that Muslim men should live according to true Islamic teachings by taking at least a second wife, and preferably four as he has (Mapes, 2003). This use of Quranic verses by Puspo Wardoyo to justify his attitude created more reactions from Muslim women's organisations. For example, Maria Ulfah Anshor, the head of Fatayat NU said that the attitude of Puspo to use Islamic symbols could be categorized as undermining the women's movement and must be criticised (Mapes, 2003). In a different way, Muslimat NU also reacted to the polygamy

issue by starting a serial of *Bahtsul Masail* (discussion of problems) held between November 2000 and April 2001 (Thohir, [nd. 2001]:15).

Yet, discussions about polygamy were not a new issue in Indonesia. Discourses surrounding polygamy were debated at least a hundred years ago dating back to R.A. Kartini's era. Through her letters written in Dutch addressed to her pen friend Stella Zeehandelaar and later published in *Door Duisternis Tot Licht* (Through Darkness to Light) she often criticized Javanese cultures that did not give more opportunities for women to participate in public life. One of her displeasures was the Javanese male attitude of polygamy. She further said,

The public must not know what we are really fighting – the name of the enemy against which we take the field must never, never be cried aloud – it is polygamy. If that word were heard no man would trust his child to us. I have struggled against this, for it is as though we began our work with a lie. (Zainu'ddin, 1980:10)

Through the Javanese tradition, which was eventually called as *adat*, polygamy was practiced by the society. Vreede-de Stuers (1959:39) states,

Adat allows polygamy. These are several rules, some of them very strict, to regulate this institution, and in order to take a second wife, the husband has to submit to these rules. It often happens that he has to inform his first wife and even ask her permission. The Muslim prescription of limited polygamy, which commands the husband to be just to his wives, has been reinforced by *adat*.

Marlita and Poerwandari (2000:84) also argue on the importance of religious teachings' interpretation to legitimise cultural practices of polygamy.

However, the Indonesian *adat* was rarely used as an important source to analyse the rooted polygamy practice which occurred in the society. Islam which is embraced by the majority of Indonesian people was more commonly used in the debate about this practice. It partly explained also why tensions sometimes occurred between Muslim organisations and nationalists when holding a discourse on the subject. For instance, during the first congress of Indonesian women in

1928, Aisyiyah, one of the Islamic movements, was in disagreement with other women's organisations which opposed polygamy. Aisyiyah argued that polygamy was an institution allowed and tolerated by the Quran (Vreede-de Stuers, 1960:104). In 1931 there was a demonstration organized by Sarekat Istri Jakarta against the decision announced by the All-Women's Conference (where an Indonesian radical organisation, Isteri Sedar, took part) in Lahore which had declared itself to be opposed to polygamy (Vreede-de Stuers, 1960:91). In 1952, the protest posed by mostly women's organisations minus Muslim women organisations such as Muslimat NU against PP 19/1952 which guaranteed more pensions for civil servants who did polygamy (Radjab, 2004:78). 1974 marked the end of the debates on polygamy through the marriage bill released by the New Order government. Even though as Marlita and Poerwandari stated, "this legislation does not eliminate the practice of polygamy" (2000:104).

In the period of reform, the polygamy issue took a new form of debate. The discourse was initially exposed by males who had been, according to Blackburn (as cited in White, 2004:274), 'the main defenders' in the pre-war period. Men showed the benefit of doing polygamy and took some actions towards its promotion. On the other hand, Muslim women, who had often been uncritical, began to criticise polygamy and urged the reinterpretation of Islamic texts in favour of Muslim women's rights.

Muslimat NU's fatwa on polygamy

Muslimat NU, which in 1952 stood for defending polygamy based on the Quran, started to view polygamy as a marriage form that should not be practiced by males. Muslimat NU held two seminars, in November 2000 and in April 2001, concerning current issues on marriage such as polygamy, marriage of a couple having different faiths, abortion and pornography. The seminars were followed by *bahtsul masail* and a *fatwa* related to polygamy and divorce (Thohir, [nd. 2001]:61-65). Through this *fatwa*, Muslimat NU stated that the principle of marriage in Islam is monogamous. Islam allows polygamy as only a *pintu darurat* (emergency door) based on the Quran (4:3) and (4:129) (Thohir, [nd. 2001]:61).

The verse (4:3) is the main reason behind people's subjection about Islamic permission to men to take more than one wife. The verse (4:3) means,

And if you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, or three, or four; but if you fear you will not do justice, then (marry) only one or that which your right hands possess. This is more proper that you may not do injustice.

However, the other verse (4:129) states,

And you cannot do justice between wives, even though you wish (it), but be not disinclined (from one) with total disinclination, so that you leave her in in suspense. And if you are reconciled and keep your duty, surely Allah is ever Forgiving, the Merciful”

By combining both verses, Muslimat NU argued that the ideal form of marriage in Islam is monogamy. The verse (4:129) emphasizes on the certainty of the males difficulty to do justice even if they desire to do it, whereas the important requirement to take more than one wife is to do justice first (4:3). As stated by Engineer, the verse (4:129) orders male to refrain from taking more wives than one (1992:103).

Muslimat NU further recommended to the NU board to reconsider NU's decision made at its Congress in Lirboyo, East Java, 1999 about the call for the withdrawal of PP 10/1983 since this government regulation was still relevant especially for gender protection from the view of legal justice. Moreover, Muslimat NU recommended to the government to review some articles in the Marriage Law including the phrase *ada atau tidaknya* (with or without) an agreement from his wife in the article 41 b. Muslimat NU proposed “*harus ada persetujuan isteri*” (there must be an agreement from his wife) in its place (Thohir, [nd. 2001]:66).

However, this Muslimat NU's reinterpretation of Islamic teachings concerning polygamy did not reflect all members of Muslimat NU. Many of them

exposed their ambiguous position towards this issue as I explain in the following section.

Interviewees' response to the polygamy issue

Although there was not one interviewee who argued that polygamy has to be totally prohibited, views ranged from defending the Quranic interpretation permitting such practice to regarding it as an abuse of the Islamic teachings. Therefore, some women advocated the abandonment of polygamy whereas some others preferred to abstain. However, all the interviewees agreed that personally they do not want to become victims of polygamy. For instance, Khofifah Indar Parawansa said,

Praise to Allah, none of Muslimat NU board members whether they are at national level or at regional level is *dipoligami* (a victim of polygamy), even board members who are wives of traditional *kyai*. Take for example, the wife of Kyai Muhaiminan, she is not a victim of polygamy.

Similarly, Lathifah Hasyim said, "I just follow what the religion says...in principle, I do not want to know about that [polygamy], no one of my family does that". A clear statement was said by Ratu Dian Hatifah, "Within NU, the discourse on polygamy is a common one ...as long as it does not happen to me. It is unfortunate that sometimes I have to take someone's example for explaining about the polygamy marriage".

The fact that the polygamous marriage is common among traditional Muslims is admitted by other interviewees. Umroh Machfudzoh said, "I think many of our people [within NU] do polygamy". Meanwhile, Anisah Mahfudz emphasized that the classical texts are the reason behind why many *kyai* practice polygamy. She said, "I think that the educational process passed by *ulama* was based on those *kitab kuning* which sometimes promise the repayment in the hereafter such as...paradise. That is why some women and men support the practice of polygamy".

The majority of interviewees agreed that they could not challenge the traditionalist interpretation that the Quran permits polygamy. However, they did not think that polygamy is neither optional nor prohibited. Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, for instance, commented on the abuse of the verse on polygamy:

Indeed, the Quran permits men to take two, three or four wives. I could not reject this verse, otherwise I will be in disagreement with the principle of the religion. However, they [males] often cut the verse in the middle and do not continue to the end. They use this verse as a justification to marry more than one [wife].

Ida Fauziyah exposed, for instance, a group which promotes polygamy. “It is a difficult issue ... There are writings from Hizbut Tahrir (Freedom Party) explaining that polygamy is a solution for many women’s problems. I do not agree with their point of view”. Although Zunatul Mafruchah personally disagreed with polygamy, she acknowledged that Islam and *adat* permit polygamous marriage.

Polygamy is permitted both in religion and *adat* (culture) and the society does not think too much about this issue. The important thing now is how to respect the feeling of those women. In Islam, there is the feeling of justice, the feeling of comfort and hindering the annoyance... From a 100 percent people who do polygamy, I believe only one percent who can do what the religion commands to do. I personally disagree with polygamy, even though a wife accepts.

Ermalena also expressed her discomfort with polygamy but in an ambiguous way,

Maybe I am not a person who really disagrees with polygamy. I see that men are rational...as long as he can do justice, if he cannot do that, we have to fight him, because it is the main source of violence. Do not do that if you cannot do justice.

The discourse on polygamy is heavily dominated by the interviewees’ questioning about how far men can fulfill the conditions of polygamy, particularly the justice. Ida, for instance, measured the justice by the state of family in

polygamous marriage. If all members of the family, including their children, live in harmony so, it can be said that justice is done. Another interviewee, Umroh Machfudzoh, proposed a specific term for a man fulfilling the conditions. “Unless there is a *mukhlis* (a very sincere person to Allah) who behaves really just as the Quran commands, he can do the polygamy. However, so far, I have rarely found someone who is like that”.

It is true that the majority of interviewees have a rather ambivalent position towards polygamy, since the Quran permits and many of *kyai* practice polygamous marriage. However, there were two interviewees, one defended the permission of polygamy based on the Quran and another firmly rejected the practice of polygamy based on the reinterpretation of the same source. The first was maintained by Asmah Sjachruni and the second by Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid. Asmah said,

Polygamy is permitted in our religion. We will never state that polygamy is *haram* (prohibited). Not like some of the new generation of NU ... who say that polygamy is *haram*. I am a Muslim. I cannot refuse anything that is determined by the religion. My principle is ‘what is *halal* (permitted) is *halal*, and what is *haram* is *haram*’.

Another tone is expressed by Sinta Nuriyah. She said,

In the Quran, there are two words which mean justice, those are ‘*qasatha*’ and ‘*adala*’. *Qasatha* is used for justice concerning material condition, while ‘*adala*’ is used for justice concerned with the emotions (*immaterial*) such as caring and love. Can men fulfill those requirements? The answer is no. *Walan tastathi‘u an ta‘dilu baynan nisa’i walau harashtum* (Then you will never be able to be fair and just between women, even if it is your ardent desire) (The Quran, 4:129). That implicitly means the marriage in Islam is monogamous, not polygamous ... If there is a politician who does polygamy, he breaks the Islamic teachings and he must be sacked, not be chosen because he does not do a good deed.

Sinta Nuriyah's refusal of the polygamous marriage was expressed again when she attended the 2004 Congress of NU in Surakarta. The Congress committees allowed Puspo Wardoyo, the primary supporter of polygamy, to open his food stall with cheap price during the Congress. Sinta Nuriyah expressed her disagreement by opening a rival food stall and organising a rally to reject Puspo's foods. She further said that allowing a polygamous restaurant chain owner to serve foods in such an important congress is a disregard towards the status and the dignity of women (Tempo Interaktif, 2004).

Illustration 5: Cover of the module for women's voter education, 1999

(Are women independent in their political choice?)



Source: (Munir et al., 1999)

Chapter six: Muslimat NU's strategies in negotiating gender relations

Different strategies of Muslimat NU

In this chapter I analyse the way in which Muslimat NU has negotiated gender relations with NU. Investigating the activities of Muslimat NU from different historical eras and political contexts, I found that Muslimat NU used varied strategies when negotiating with its parent organisation, NU. I mention four strategies: persuasion, bargaining, the 'patriarchal bargain', and pressure. I also noted that external political factors played an important role in the conduct and process of negotiations.

Although those strategies can be described independently, in fact, strategies may overlap one another. Furthermore, Muslimat NU may use several strategies in different negotiations during the same historical and political context.

The persuading strategy

This strategy involves women in Muslimat NU making efforts to persuade men (i.e. NU) about the importance of their involvement in gaining interests for both parties. The persuading strategy is often used when women are in a weak position for negotiating gender relations, although not exclusively. Women may still use this strategy while in a strong position of negotiating gender relations in order to further strengthen their position. In this regard, Asmah Sjachruni's view is interesting.

Within NU, we should not oppose (*musuhi*) them [men]. But we should present our ideas, which we hold strongly. We [women in the 1950s] were perceived as the left wing. Thus, we should persuade them (*membangun pengertian*) that the left wing has to be equal to the right wing.

This strategy was used by women of NU in negotiating gender relations such as in the case of women's insistence to be accepted as active members prior to the establishment of a women's section within NU in 1946 (see chapter two). They based their persuasive argument on the ground that their contributions were beneficial for the interest of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* followers (Muslim traditionalists) at large. For instance, during the 1938 Congress of NU in Menes, Banten, Nyi R. Djuaisih, made a speech that set out this position.

She explained in detail the principles and the aims of Nahdlatul Ulama. Nahdlatul Ulama is an organisation which focuses on the education of the Muslim community about all aspects of Islam. In Islam, not only men have to be educated about religious teachings; women, as their spouses, have to be (*wajib*) educated as well. This will bring them towards the salvation in this world and the hereafter. "I, on behalf of Muslim women (*Muslimaat*) of Bandung welcome this Congress in Menes. I hope that all decisions taken here will advance all Muslim women" (Dachlan A, 1955:32).

Nyi R. Djuaisih in her speech persuaded the men of Nahdlatul Ulama of the importance of women being educated in their religion because educated women will help all family members (men and women alike) to gain salvation. The argument that women –and especially spouses– need to be educated has the further implication that women should be involved in the public sphere, such as being active members of NU, an issue which had not been accepted by NU up until that moment.

Solechah Saifuddin Zuhri (1979:41) in her history of Muslimat NU addresses this issue.

Movements of women emerged from several points, impacted on Muslim women in Indonesia as well, particularly Muslim women of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* (traditional Islam). It is hard to imagine the strategies those women who loved NU used in order to persuade (*meyakinkan*) different parties in this organisation to offer Muslimat a chance to play a role within the organisation.

These comments indicate that women of NU persuasively negotiated better relations on the basis of the argument that interests of men and women would benefit from the result of negotiation (e.g. traditional Islam would be defended and would flourish). The emergence of women's organisations such as Aisyiyah founded in 1917 and affiliated to the reformist organisation, Muhammadiyah, is an external factor which was significant for the process of negotiation between women of NU and NU during the 1930s.

On the other hand, at that time NU considered that women's participation was still unnecessary because it was perceived that women's appropriate place was their home as the *kitab kuning* suggest and that men's efforts were enough to defend the interest of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah*. In addition, the fact that Indonesia was under the Dutch administration made *kyai* of NU fear that the administration would also apply some restrictive regulations such as BVV (see chapter two) to women if they were involved in an organisation. It is also important to note that many leaders of Muslimat NU were (and continue to be) family members and relatives of *kyai* (see Diagram 3).

All those reasons contributed to NU's refusal of female members. NU stated that women's participation in the organisation would pose more problems (*mudharat*) than bring benefit (*manfa'at*) (see chapter two). In its refusal, NU followed a principle of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) stating "*dar'ul mafasid aulam (muqaddamun 'ala) jalbi al-mashalih*". This principle means that if there is both danger and benefit in doing something, a traditional Muslim should prioritise avoiding the danger rather than pursuing the benefit (Daman, 2004:91). The benefit in this case is the defence and the spread of the concepts of *ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah* among women while the danger was women being suspected by the

Dutch administration. NU preferred, thus, avoiding the danger by prohibiting women from being active in the organisation.

The process of negotiating gender relations between women of NU and the wider organisation by persuasion continued during the 1930s until some male leaders endorsed the idea that women's involvement in the organisation was important. Women's participation by attending in mass in the 1938 Congress of NU was a new step towards better relations. During this meeting two opposite views from men were presented: first, the supportive view of K.H. Wahab Chasbullah, a principal founder of NU, as follows (as cited in Dachlan A, 1955:31).

Within the Muslim community, it is not only men (*kaum bapa*) who have the obligation to learn and practice the religion as their duty towards the God, but women (*kaum ibu*) also have to follow men in this regard. Both men and women have to practice together what Islam teaches to them.

Second, the unsupportive view of K.H. Abdurrahman Menes, a local *kyai*, as follows (as cited by Dachlan A, 1955:31).

In fact, wives have to follow all orders from their husbands. If they disregard orders and advice from their husbands, it means that they disobey God. Such wives will feel the lure of hell which is very hot.

However, K.H. Abdurrahman Menes also acknowledged the importance of understanding the principles and the aims of NU for the female audience (i.e. the interest of both parties).

The bargaining strategy

Using the bargaining strategy, women (i.e. Muslimat NU) bargain with men (i.e. NU) about more equal gender relations. The bargaining strategy is used when women are relatively equal in power –though it may only be momentary– vis-à-vis men when negotiating gender relations because women have, for example, a certain quality or a position that already serves 'men's interests'. The failure of

such negotiation might have the consequence that women will use their relatively equal power to do what they think will consolidate equal gender relations without the consent of men.

The case of Umroh Machfudzoh while negotiating her participation in politics with her husband shows the use of this strategy. Umroh said during the interview,

When I finished my study at the state institute of Islamic studies, I wanted to apply for a position as public servant in the religious court. My husband did not agree. "No, no, why do women enter the religious court?" I replied, "So, why did I continue my study? What for?" I went on to say, "Okay, if you disagree that I apply to be a public servant in the religious court, I will be active in politics". My husband then said, "That's fine, if you want to be active in politics I welcome it. You can guide religious meetings". Thus, I felt resolute in my decision to become involved in politics.

Umroh Machfudzoh had six children when she attended tertiary education with the permission of her husband. She had to bear burdens while continuing her study. This quality (i.e. having the tertiary degree, bearing burdens during the study, being permitted by the husband or even supported) made Umroh possess relatively 'equal' power to her husband. She further bargained for his permission to apply for the job in the religious court. The refusal of her husband added another push for her power. She, then, bargained for participation in politics. In this case, the bargain ended with her husband's acceptance that she could become involved in politics.

The bargaining strategy is called by Handayani and Novianto (2004:144) the strategy of devotion (*pengabdian*). These authors studied the power of Javanese women through their cultural values. They argued that Javanese women have the persistence to bear burdens in order to gain the authority. They went on to say,

The importance issue is how women's needs can be fulfilled without jeopardising the harmony because they drive out their cultural values. Therefore, carrying, serving and total devotion to their husbands can be understood as women's strategy to possess authority and receive what they expect.

This strategy also means *memangku* (to hold a person on your lap) or *mengambil hati* (to win someone's heart). Javanese people believe that someone will obey another if his or her heart is won. This is symbolised by the Javanese 'letter' (a letter corresponds to a syllable) which becomes 'silent' (*mati*), a consonant, when the letter is held on by a symbol which corresponds to the act of sitting down (Handayani & Novianto, 2004:144). Since the majority of NU women are Javanese (see chapter five) they are likely to use this 'Javanese' strategy in their negotiations with NU.

The bargaining strategy was effectively used by women of NU when they negotiated their relation with NU after the proclamation of Indonesian independence. NU released its *fatwa* in 1945 known as *resolusi jihad* (holy war resolution) urging men and women to bear arms in the name of Allah for fighting against the Dutch administration (see chapter two). Following this *fatwa*, NU women's involvement in the public sphere was very significant. Women helped men in providing food, information (doing liaison), and some women even became active soldiers. These activities of women of NU were opportunities to access relatively 'equal' power to that of men. They showed the quality of women (e.g. they could organise) and at the same time served 'men's interests' (e.g. they assisted men in the struggle). That women could gain equal power because of the war is also maintained by Vreede-de Stuers (1960:163).

The next step is clear. Women of NU used their involvement during the war as evidence of their capability to play a role in the public sphere and their devotion to interests articulated by men. They negotiated active participation in NU as part of better relations. Their bargain was that if NU did not agree that women could be active members and could organise themselves within NU, they would join other women's organisations. Because they were aware that "to

improve their situations women have to organise themselves in organisations where women can express what is in their heart. They can work and do activities together to achieve the improvement” (Dachlan A, 1955:28-29). In this regard, I have mentioned the attitude of prudence showed by K.H.M. Dachlan (see chapter two), a former general chairperson of NU, which indicated his fear that women of NU could join other organisations or other political parties if their demand was not accommodated by NU and consequently, NU would lose part of its interests (e.g. loss of women’s support for spreading the traditional concepts of Islam).

NU finally decided to accept them in a section called Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat in 1946. The decision of NU was likely based on another principle of *fiqh* stating *idza ta’aradla mafsadatani ra’iya a’dhamuha dliwaran bi al-irtikabi akhaffihima*. This principle means that if there are two negative impacts, a traditional Muslim has to consider the less dangerous of the two (Daman, 2004:91). According to K.H.M. Dachlan (1955:10), male delegates during the 1946 Congress of NU still opposed to the creation of a section for women. However, Dachlan could convince them by his explanation and with support from K.H. Hasjim Asj’ari and K.H. Wahab Chasbullah (see chapter two). If this new decision of NU is compared to its previous stance, it can be said that the view that the involvement of women in the organisation posed more problems than benefits was still held. However, the new development (i.e. the war and its consequences) signalled new threats (e.g. women of NU disobeying their husbands by joining non-NU organisations, loss of NU men’s interests). If both dangers were compared, accepting women within NU would be less dangerous, and that was the decision.

The bargaining strategy which occurred in the above case also depended on external political factors. The end of Japanese occupation and the war against the Dutch administration in order to defend the independence of Indonesia impacted on the changing political situation in Indonesia. The negotiation for better relations between NU and women of NU which follows this new political situation was successful, partly because of this new political context and partly because some influential *ulama* changed their view based on the new development

and others based on the new paradigm in gender relations (i.e. I refer to the case of K.H. Wahab Chasbullah who supported women's membership even before the war occurred).

The same strategy was used after the changing of the status of Muslimat from a women's section into an autonomous body. In 1952, NU granted Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat a more independent status following the withdrawal of NU from the Masjumi Party. In order to mark this event Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat changed its name to Muslimat NU. As a consequence of its withdrawal from Masjumi, NU changed its nature from a socioreligious organisation to a political party (see chapter three). As such NU needed mass electoral support especially to participate in the 1955 elections. The changing status of Muslimat NU was meant to support NU's new orientation. Muslimat NU was needed to politically support NU and this strengthened its power for negotiating better gender relations. In this regard Muslimat NU made two important demands during the 1954 Congress, namely women holding positions in the religious court and women being selected as candidates in the 1955 elections. The 1954 Congress delivered a decision saying that women were permitted to be 'members' of the religious court. Furthermore, a *fatwa* was delivered in 1957 permitting women to become MPs (see chapter three). Five women of Muslimat NU were elected as members of the Legislative Council in the 1955 elections. In this case, the external political factor (i.e. the withdrawal of NU from Masjumi and the 1955 elections) contributed to the reinterpretation of religious texts and the bargaining strategy resulted in better gender relations.

The 'patriarchal bargain' strategy

This strategy refers to a situation in which women achieve some gains for themselves without challenging the norms that support male power. Kandiyoti (as cited in Waylen, 1996:18) says, "Different systems may represent different kinds of "patriarchal bargain" for women with different rules of the game and differing strategies for maximising security and optimising their life options". She further maintains that the 'patriarchal bargain' can explain the reason why women

sometimes act in ways which are in conflict with their long-term interests. Women pay the price of a 'patriarchal bargain' but they get the protection in return. This bargain is likely to occur if other alternatives for women's empowerment are absent (as cited in Waylen, 1996:18).

The 'patriarchal bargain' strategy was used by Muslimat NU during the critical period under the New Order regime within effectively restricted women activities in the public sphere, using the alleged atrocities committed by Gerwani in 1965 as the justification (see chapter four). The imposition of the New Order ideology confining the role of women in the domestic sphere resulted in a fear of voicing demands for gender equality. Furthermore, Muslimat NU feared the regime because of its association with NU, which was considered as an opposition party (see chapter four). With regard to this political pressure, Muslimat followed the government initiative to establish a family planning program. This can be seen as using the 'patriarchal bargain'. By organising such activities Muslimat NU expected that they would be less suspected by the regime or gain a certain security, though Muslimat NU, by so doing, seemed to support the ideology of the regime which was in conflict with its long-term interests.

From another perspective, particularly from the bargaining strategy perspective, Muslimat NU's program in family planning, which entailed its demand to NU to deliver a *fatwa* supporting its program, was an advance in certain aspects of gender relations. Muslimat NU could use its relative power obtained through its conformity with the regime's ideology to bargain with NU in delivering such a supporting *fatwa*.

With regard to this initiative, the family planning program organised by Muslimat NU was appreciated by the wider organisation. Muslimat NU's effort could be understood as moderating the regime's negative perception of both NU and Muslimat. The attitude of initiating protection for the whole family while in danger is called *cancut tali wondo* in Javanese tradition (Handayani & Novianto, 2004:139). They argue that this attitude is one of the characteristics of Javanese women. It means "an attitude which depicts the ability to involve, to play a

significant role, or even to take over the command and the strategy in facing the problem from the idea to the implementation” (Handyani & Novianto, 2004, 139).

However, the overall price Muslimat NU had to pay with regard to other aspects of gender equality during the New Order was considerable. For instance, Muslimat NU members in the Legislative Council decreased from seven women in 1960 to only two women in the 1992-1997 session. Starting from the late 1970s, NU did not include members of Muslimat NU in Syuriah (Supreme Religious Council).

The decision of NU to deliver a supporting *fatwa* with regard to the family planning program and to cease women’s membership in Syuriah was likely based on a *fiqh* principle stating *tasharruf al-imam ‘ala al-ra’iyah manuthun bil al mashlahah*. This principle means that the leader should rule the Muslim community according to their best interests. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, a former general chairperson of NU, often mentions this principle¹². NU placed (and continues to place) itself as the leader of all autonomous bodies affiliated with it (see Diagram 2). As such NU had to consider their best interests when making decisions. The fact that NU was considered by the regime as the opposition restricted its activity. In order to reduce the political pressure on all autonomous bodies, and in this case on Muslimat NU, NU decided to assist Muslimat by delivering a supporting *fatwa* and to cease women’s membership in Syuriah because, according to NU, they served the best interests of Muslimat in this critical period.

The pressure strategy

In the pressure strategy women (i.e. Muslimat NU) use the external factors with which they were proactively involved in designing in order to pressure men (i.e. NU) in negotiating more equal gender relations. The pressure strategy is similar to the bargaining strategy but the difference is that with the pressure strategy women are proactive in designing the external factor while with the bargaining strategy

¹² The last time that I heard him mentioning this principle was at a discussion during his visit to Canberra on December 2004.

the external factor appears without involvement from women. With the pressure strategy, the power which women possess in negotiating better gender relations is from their own efforts. Women using this strategy are likely to be in 'equal' power to men. Women are more confident with the result compared to the bargaining strategy since they were involved in designing the pressuring factor. The failure of the first negotiation will add to women's power and can be used through the second negotiation and so on. A similar view of the use of external pressure is stated by Topi Omas Ihromi (as cited in Robinson, 1998:217), "they [international instruments] can be used as a *perkakas yang ampuh* (an invulnerable instrument) by activists because they impose a reporting back to the international forum".

The new discourse in the quota system is an example of the use of the pressure strategy. With regard to the idea of pressure, Khofifah Indar Parawansa said in the interview (i.e. talking about a quota system and gender sensitiveness),

I am afraid that the political will of men appears if they are pressured. If the pressure is gone, they return to their former stance. Now, they are under pressure. They will feel shame if they are perceived as insensitive to the gender problems. This has a big influence on them.

Members of Muslimat NU through several political parties as well as the Muslimat NU board were involved in and supported the enactment of the 30 percent quota for women candidates for the Legislative Council (see chapter five). The quota bill as Blackburn (2004) says "if enforced, will impact on Islamic parties, in ways that are as yet unforeseeable. This is a good example of sustained lobbying by women across the political and religious board having an impact on political Islam".

The use of the quota system which itself is an external political development to pressure NU while negotiating better gender relations is the next step in the pressure strategy. According to Khofifah (interview), she used the quota issue to question women's position within NU's structure during the 2004 NU Congress in Surakarta.

I was involved from the first process, in discussions, in the steering committee, and in the *muktamar* (congress). I even led a session. But I concluded that the gender relation issue in NU is still at the level of a *wacana* (discourse). For the implementation, unfortunatelytheir response is, “Yes, we did not refuse it [the discourse]. But this doesn’t mean that it should be written down”. What we need is a written decision, so it is binding on district and provincial boards ... I proposed “How about adding the numbers of chairpersons to include at least 10 people. Seven PBNU and 3 women”. They insisted once again that males did not refuse this but there was no need for it to be written down

Although the negotiation failed, Khofifah noted that subsequently the NU central board proposed that Muslimat NU head some of NU institutions. In fact, a similar demand of women’s involvement in Tanfidziyah (Executive Body) has been posed by Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi during the 1999 Congress of NU (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:23-25). Yet, NU only included two women in Syuriah (Religious Supreme Council) as *a’wan* (non-core committee members).

Why do women matter in Tanfidziyah? NU as the leading socioreligious organisation in Indonesia often makes decisions related to internal affairs (e.g. organisational policies, *bahtsul masail* or religious discussion) and to the external affairs in politics, economy, etc. without consulting and involving women, though all members including women suffer the same consequences (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:23-24). According to Khofifah (interview), because most of PBNU’s policies are not socialised to its autonomous bodies, it is only the men who receive the benefit from those policies. In addition, outsiders often think that having an agreement with NU will cover all its members, including women, which is untrue.

However, at the level of discourse, as admitted by Khofifah, NU has shown some progress. The *fatwa* (religious advice) of 1997 on women’s place in Islam, followed by another *fatwa* in 1999 calling for an affirmative action, support the importance of women playing a significant role in the public sphere (see chapter five). The draft of the 1999 *fatwa* mentions a principle of *fiqh* (Islamic

jurisprudence) which is used as the basis for this view, *al hukmu yaduru ma'a 'illatihi wujudan wa 'adaman* (PBNNU, 1999:58). This principle means that the regulation follows the reason behind its enactment, if the reason vanishes, the regulation changes (Daman, 2001:92). Following this argument, women's restrictive rules were a product of certain historical circumstances. Because people have changed, those rules lost their *raison d'être*, thus the rules have to change. The downfall of the New Order regime and the press freedom open new opportunities for women to actively participate in the public sphere. This changing political situation is a new circumstance which requires new rules of the game for gender relations. According to Blackburn (2004), "it is just a matter of time before they [political Islam] accept more liberal interpretations of scriptures" and they implement them.

The proactive character of Muslimat NU's actions is also seen from its efforts to hold independent *bahtsul masail* (religious discussions). Muslimat NU held two seminars in 2000 and 2001 concerning current issues regarding marriage. The seminars were followed by *bahtsul masail* and a *fatwa* related to polygamy and divorce (see chapter five). Within NU's rules, such *fatwa* delivered by Muslimat NU has to be reported first to Syuriyah NU for its legalisation. Muslimat NU's view on polygamy can be seen as a new discourse which discourages the practice. From the 1940s onward women within NU's organisations rarely discuss this sensitive issue especially with a negative tone since many of NU leaders (*kyai*) practice polygamy (see chapter five). This new approach impacts on Muslimat-NU relations. For instance, in the 2004 Congress of NU held in Surakarta, Central Java, NU allowed all autonomous bodies of NU to hold their respective *bahtsul masail* and they may not need the Syuriyah's approval as long as they follow the NU methods in delivering *fatwa* (interview with Khofifah, for NU methods see Masyhuri, 1997:364-367).

A similar proactive action is shown by some prominent leaders of Muslimat NU such as the critical study group about *kitab kuning* chaired by Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid. Through her project, she –supported by many women activists and gender-sensitive men– published *Wajah Baru Relasi Suami*

Istri, a critical book reviewing male gender-biased views on *kitab kuning* (see chapter one). There is a strong chance that the Sinta Nuriyah model will be followed by other similar actions in the future. There is an emergence of *ulama perempuan* or *kyai perempuan* (women religious scholars) in the last 40 or 50 years alongside the emergence of *pesantren putri* (Islamic boarding school for girls) (Faiqoh, 2003:32; Marcoes-Natsir & Hasyim, 1997:10). In addition, the number of young females who attend *madrasah* (Islamic schools) has overtaken the number of young males with 51 percent females and 49 percent males according to the 2001 statistics (Faiqoh, 2003:278)¹³.

This analysis of Muslimat NU's strategies shows that women of NU during more than sixty four years since 1938 have struggled for gaining equal gender relations. Their continuous struggle was done in silence since many strategies which they used emphasized on soft negotiations with *akhlaqul karimah* (good manners). Leaders of Muslimat NU claimed that their organisation has had a tradition of avoiding conflict (Blackburn, 2004). By so doing, Muslimat NU is often perceived as an organisation which did not struggle for gender issues (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:44). But perhaps, as argued by Blackburn (2004), it was the stronger for that reason.

¹³ According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs the number of female students in *madrasah* in 2000-2001 is 2,778,927 greater than that of male students 2,670,443 or female students represent 51 percent and male students 49 percent. In contrast, in public schools the percentage is 52 percent for male students and 48 percent for female students out of a total number of 37,993,854 students.

Chapter seven: Conclusion

The history of Indonesian Islam, according to Benda (1985), is the history of the expanding *santri* civilisation and its impact upon the religious, social and political life of Indonesia. Nahdlatul Ulama, the leading organisation of *santri*, from the Japanese occupation played an important role in flourishing the social and political life in Indonesia. The Japanese believing that to win the hearts and minds of Indonesian people should increase the role of religious leaders.

Muslimat was initially formed as a women's section of NU, established in 1946 with the permission of NU after years of struggle for the acceptance of the parent organisation. It was made possible because Muslimat worked hand in hand with NU in the struggle against the returning Dutch administration. The further history of Muslimat shows its survival throughout decades. It shows Muslimat's ability to engage with different political systems using diverse strategies. Hence its strategies have saved Muslimat during its critical times. Expressions used in the books published by Muslimat NU which I refer to in this study also reflect the diverse historical and political contexts that Muslimat NU has passed through. One might doubt that Muslimat has made important changes with regard to the equal relations between men and women, but one must agree that Muslimat has succeeded to survive within many constraints imposed by changing political systems.

This historical perspective of Muslimat NU shows the dynamic of the women's movement amongst traditional Muslims. Muslimat NU, as a women's organisation within NU, played increasing public and visible roles in politics from 1946 to 1970. The Muslimat's participation in the war against the Dutch marked

the beginning of Muslimat's engagement in public life. Muslimat members joined the army, providing food, nursing, or sometimes became under cover agents. Muslimat members then supported NU in political practice. Following the secession of NU from Masyumi, Muslimat became an important agent of NU for gaining more electoral support in the first Indonesian 1955 general elections. Muslimat NU was among the first women's organisations which had members elected to the national parliament. Muslimat NU also succeeded in enhancing their public role by joining other women's organisations. Together with representatives of these other groups, Muslimat established a new institution concerned with marriage in 1960. Muslimat NU stood in opposition when a draft of Law on Marriage was imposed by the government in 1957. Muslimat NU has also shown its concerns with mothers' and children's care by establishing health centres since 1962. A significant role was played by Muslimat in demanding NU to release a firm statement against the communist party after the 1965 attempted coup. Once, Muslimat NU was the leader of a big rally demanding the ban of the communist party.

However, the growing equal relations between NU and Muslimat were disrupted when opportunities for smooth negotiations were interfered with the New Order regime. Both NU and Muslimat were vulnerable at that moment. The political pressures and the ideology promoting the confining of women from the public sphere slowly deteriorated the relations between NU and Muslimat. Both NU and Muslimat had to survive in order to ensure their *ummah* (followers, Muslim community) were no longer pressured. Finally NU decided to stay out of politics, whereas Muslimat wanted to save both Muslimat and NU by endorsing programs superimposed by the regime. They both had to believe that 'house and children' were the proper place for women. NU did not even include women in its board, something that did not happen in the 1950s. It seemed that NU would like to return to the period of 1940s where Muslimat were trapped in their houses. It seemed also that the state had succeeded to superimpose its ideology upon these organisations.

The late period of the Soeharto regime was marked by an improvement of gender relations within NU. Muslimat NU began to build new relations with NU. Muslimat wanted to be more independent from its parent and finally Muslimat dared to state that Muslimat was independent vis-à-vis all political parties. This strategy was successful in obtaining assistance from the regime. Muslimat also began to endorse the international agenda, which primarily discuss all matters related with women issues from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Male members of NU began to rethink male-female relations. In 1997, NU supported by female participants declared an important decision related to women's public roles. Women were permitted to become leaders of the nation as long as they fulfilled all requirements. Although political circumstances were assumed to be the reason of the emergence of such a decision, at least, Muslimat together with other female organisations affiliated to NU felt that it was the starting moment to confidently campaign for more political participation of women. In the 1999 Congress, NU released a *fatwa* which sensitively supported women's roles in the public sphere. NU introduced the word 'affirmative action' and contextual reading over the *kitab kuning*. NU re-included Muslimat in the Syuriah structure. The way that NU has dealt with the demands for gender equity coming from Muslimat NU reflects the way NU deals with all political challenges: by reflecting jurisprudence.

However, Muslimat NU has learnt that the struggle to gain male-female equal relations could not only occur from within. It should also be pushed from the outside. Since the *reformasi* era Muslimat encouraged its members from different political parties to propose a quota for women. The quota system can be used as a new *perkakas yang ampuh* to pressure NU males towards better relations. An independent *bahtsul masail* was introduced by Muslimat as another way to voice a different religious perspective on men-women relations.

The history of relations between NU and Muslimat shows that NU women have been able to work effectively with the parent organisation, and that despite what some would regard as a conservative image, NU has been able to accommodate emerging demands for more gender equity. It is of hope,

nevertheless, that this study can contribute to fulfil the neglect of third world women's 'public' political actions, signalled by Stivens (1991:10), which "alone represents a number of missed opportunities, not only for mainstream political science, but also for some feminist theorising".

Appendix (Short biography of the interviewees)

Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi

Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi¹⁴ was born in Jombang, East Java, on June, 6, 1940 from a prominent *kyai* family within NU. Her father, K.H.A. Wahid Hasyim, was a former member of KNIP, a Minister of Religious Affairs (and a leading figure of NU between the 1940's and 1950's. Meanwhile her mother, Solichah A. Wahid, was a prominent figure of Muslimat and a member of the national parliament from the NU Party. Her grandfather, K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari, was a founder of NU and its only *Rais Akbar*. Furthermore, she is a sister of K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia. Growing up within this family of activists and politicians her participation in both organisations and politics was a normal course.

Aisyah was the general chairperson of Muslimat NU central board between 1995 and 2000. However, she started to participate in organisations while she was still young. She joined Fatayat NU after she finished high school; first at Matraman branch Jakarta where she became, in 1959, its deputy chairperson. She then became a chairperson of Fatayat NU at provincial level from 1962 and a secretary of Fatayat NU's central board from 1967. Meanwhile, she started to participate in the social section of Muslimat NU's central board helping her mother who from 1962 was the first chairperson of Muslimat NU's central board and at the same time was the social section's head. Later on Aisyah held several positions within Muslimat NU's central board such as the secretary and since 1985 the director of YKM. In 1984 she was appointed the third chairperson of Muslimat NU's central board, then the second chairperson in 1989. When Asmah Sjachruni retired from her position as the general chairperson of Muslimat NU's

¹⁴ Hamid is the first name of Aisyah's husband and Baidlowi is the name of her husband's father (as it is clear from Diagram 3). Since Indonesians do not often have a 'real' surname, citing a surname of woman (eg. Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi) may even confuse her with her husband or her husband's father. For shortening, I will use respondents' first name to refer to them. Otherwise, I will cite their long name. However, during my interview Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi highlighted her long name since she was often confused with another Aisyah (i.e. Aisyah Amini) who was a veteran parliamentarian from PPP.

central board at the 13th congress in Jakarta in 1995, Aisyah was elected to replace her.

Aisyah was also active in other organisations. For instance, she was the secretary of Ikatan Keluarga Pahlawan Nasional Indonesia (Association of Family Members of Indonesian National Heroes). In KOWANI she has held the position of chairperson since 1988. Because of her activities in social organisations she was designated by KOWANI in 1991 *Tokoh Wanita Indonesia* (Figure of Indonesian Women).

At the time Aisyah was the general chairperson of Muslimat NU central board she joined Golkar. According to her, her interest in politics was raised when she was contacted by Slamet Effendi Yusuf, a leader of Golkar from NU's background. He reminded her about the importance of being a parliamentarian. During the interview she said,

I was a social worker. My friends in Golkar, particularly, Slamet Effendi Yusuf, said to me. "It's okay that you like to work in a social organisation and do a lot there. But, do you think that bills, which have been passed up until now, give sufficient warranties for women, your clients?" From this discussion I started to have an interest in participating in politics because I realised that at that moment there was a lack of bills such as about ageing people.

After some thought she joined the party. Her entry to Golkar helped to establish a good relationship between her and *Mbak Tutut* (Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana), daughter of Soeharto and a former Minister of Social Affairs. Muslimat NU got a benefit from this relationship such as assistance to finish Muslimat's multi-purpose building (especially for skills training).

Aisyah was the general chairperson of Muslimat NU who strictly applied the rules which banned double positions. That meant that a member of Muslimat NU's core board cannot at the same time be a member of a political party core board or any other organisation. "Muslimat NU should have some distance vis-à-vis different political parties" was a common expression within board members.

This policy was based on the fact that board members of Muslimat NU were affiliated to different political parties. Aisyah said,

There were some board members of Muslimat NU who were active in Golkar since their husbands were public servants. Automatically they followed their husband's political choice. We saw that as reality. Thus, we maintained rules saying that every one could have her own political choice yet she should not carry the name of Muslimat NU but her individual name.

NU's decision in 1984 to return to its Khittah 1926 (founding charter) was also used to support this policy since it stated that basic activities of NU were in social and religious affairs and that NU was not meant to involve directly in politics.

However, Aisyah's campaign for an independent Muslimat NU with regard to politics, particularly in 1997, was often seen as campaigning for Golkar. In fact, she was a Golkar party candidate during the 1997 elections and was then elected as a member of the national parliament. Yet, the majority of NU's votes at that time went to PPP. Further, she applied the same rigorous practice of banning dual positions within Muslimat NU during the 1999 elections and called on NU not to privilege a specific party (PP Muslimat NU, 2000a:appendix). Her stand caused disputes between her and her eldest brother K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid who was the general chairperson of NU and a founder of PKB (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:70). It impacted also on her in her failure to hold the chair of Muslimat NU at the 14th congress in 2000.

Currently, Aisyah holds within Muslimat NU's structure the chairperson of the advisory council. In Golkar, she chairs Pengajian Al-Hidayah, the religious wing of the party. She was elected again as a member of the national parliament in 1999 and for the third term in the 2004 elections. During the interview she was the chairperson of a parliament special committee on a pornography bill. She admitted that in order to secure this position she had to argue first with her party leaders. She told me of her experiences,

At this moment I am the chairperson of a special committee to discuss the pornography bill. In order to obtain this opportunity I had to be strong, rigid, ready to be harassed, detracted and so on. At first my party did not put me forward for this special committee. My party tried to leave it to men. But I persisted and I said “I wanted this committee and not the others”. I persisted because I know that major victims of pornography or objects of porno-actions were, in fact, women. Thus, my concern was how we could protect them.

Anisah Machfudz

Anisah Machfudz was born in Malang, East Java, on November 16, 1961 from a religious leader family. Her mother is a respected *nyai* owner of a *pesantren* for young females in Singosari, Malang. Although she attended public schools and she is now preparing for a masters degree in government administration (public policy) at the Brawijaya University of Malang, she is well versed in Islam through attending informal teachings within her religious milieu.

Anisah joined Fatayat NU branch in Malang and is still its first deputy chairperson. Currently, she is also a counsellor of LKP2 which is an organ within Fatayat NU providing advocacy and support for the victims of domestic violence. Furthermore, she has been involved in some of the programs of Muslimat NU and has been used to work on Puan Amal Hayati’s projects, a brainchild institute of Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid advocating gender equality.

Anisah started to participate in politics when PKB was founded in 1998. Fatayat NU and Muslimat NU branch of Kabupaten Malang had recommended that she participate in PKB. According to Anisah, she was appointed because of her educational background which was in political sciences. It was difficult to find women within NU who had an educational background that was not in religious sciences. At first she was put in the women’s section of PKB at district level. Later on when the section was formalised and called PPKB she became the head of PPKB for Kabupaten Malang.

Currently, Anisah holds in PKB's structure the position of deputy head of Dewan Tanfidz of DPC (Dewan Pimpinan Cabang or District Party Board) of Kabupaten Malang and deputy head of the provincial board of PPKB (East Java). She is the only woman on her party board. She was appointed because of an internal regulation to include women within the political party structure.

There was a regulation within PKB that the core party board had to include women. I was put in though I was just one, the only woman of 22 members. I regretted that my proposal to include women in the *formatur* team (which set up board members) was not accepted even though the chairperson of that meeting was a woman.

She was appointed, as she said, because some people within the party board were her friends while studying so they personally knew her, in addition to her quality and her significant roles as an activist within women.

With regard to her participation in politics Anisah admitted that it was not her dream to be a politician though she had chosen to study political sciences. She went on to say that PKB, the child of NU, had motivated her to join politics. "When PKB was founded and sponsored by NU, I wanted to defend its values". Within her close family circle she was the first person to join politics. According to her, her interest to participate in politics came from herself. However, her far relatives such as K.H. Wahab Chasbullah whom she counts as her grandfather (see Diagram 3) had already been active in politics. She still remembers what *Mbah* (grandfather) Wahab used to say about the participation of NU in the government during the Soekarno regime that NU had to get involved in politics from the inside, so it could make changes even within Nasakom cabinet.

Before the 2004 elections Anisah was appointed to represent women in a special committee called *tim mantap* which was set up by the district party board in order to draw up the candidature list for Kabupaten Malang. At a meeting, Anisah was supported by the chairperson of Dewan Syuro of PKB of Kabupaten Malang to head the committee. This support resulted in an agreement by five members that she would chair the committee. She maintained that as the

chairperson, she could defend women's interests. In the 2004 elections, she was selected as the first of several candidates for the national parliament from PKB representing Daerah Pemilihan Jawa Timur V (East Java Elective Region V including Malang) and she was elected.

When this interview was conducted Anisah had not yet taken up office. As a new parliamentarian she admitted that she was still confused which commission she would choose. According to her there were several possibilities. She might choose a commission related to home affairs which was well-matched to her educational background. Otherwise she might choose a commission related to education or women. However, she preferred to choose commissions which lacked PKB representatives; there were already enough people from PKB in some of the commissions such as education and women.

Asmah Sjachruni

Asmah Sjachruni was born in Hulu Sungai Selatan, South Kalimantan, in 1928. She was one of the successful Muslimat NU leaders. For 16 years she was the general chairperson of Muslimat NU central board starting from 1979 to 1995. When she was elected to hold this position for the first time at the 10th congress of Muslimat NU held in Semarang in 1979 she beat three other candidates Solichah Wahid Hasjim, Sholehah Saifuddin Zuhri and Aisjah Dahlan (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:61). Within NU traditions her win had significant meaning since, first, the other candidates were wives / widows of prominent figures of NU and the family origin is an important issue within NU (see Diagram 3). For instance, Solichah was the widow of K.H.A. Wahid Hasjim, a former minister of religious affairs (1949-1952), Solechah was the wife of K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri, another former minister of religious affairs (1963-1968), and Aisjah was the wife of K.H.M. Dahlan, who according to NU sources (Ma'shum & Zawawi, 1996:120, Zuhri, 1980:135) was also a former minister of religious affairs (1950). Second, Asmah Sjachruni's origin from South Kalimantan is another interesting point since Muslimat and NU are largely Javanese (East and Central Java) dominated organisations. Non-Javanese branches were apparently solid in supporting Asmah

Sjachruni at the 1979 congress. On the other hand non-Javanese NU branches were solid behind Idham Chalid who was also from South Kalimantan during the NU congress which was held at the same time (Bruinessen, 1994:152). As Asmah Sjachruni indicated,

I was elected to hold the general chairperson position of Muslimat's central board at the Semarang congress in 1979. At the same moment NU held its congress which was most virulent when Idham Chalid had to face Achmad Sjaichu and finally Idham won (Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002:61).

Asmah Sjachruni's participation in Muslimat NU which offered further opportunities in pursuing a political career was exceptional and rather a coincidence. She and her family were forced to evacuate from her village, Timbuk Baru, to Kota Rantau (a nearby town about 100 km north of Banjarmasin) following a military revolt. In this town they rented one part of a big house¹⁵. The other part was occupied by the owner who was the NU's secretary of Kandangan branch. When NU held its congress in Palembang in 1952, the house owner was one of delegates. The Palembang congress was a turning point for NU since it declared its withdrawal from the Masyumi Party and became an independent party. As a new party NU needed voters. The chairperson of Muslimat NU (Mahmudah Mawardi) and NU's national board mandated, thus, NU's chairperson of South Kalimantan to form the provincial board of Muslimat NU in order to open branches in South Kalimantan. There had already been several branches of Muslimat NU but not yet a provincial board. While searching for a candidate for the office, NU's chairperson of South Kalimantan met NU's secretary of Kandangan, the owner of Asmah Sjachruni's house. The latter highly recommended her, saying that his tenant had likely leadership talent. She was then contacted to meet board members of NU who were totally unknown to her. She only knew NU as an organisation which defended principles of *kaum tuha* (traditionalist Muslims). At first she refused the offer to be the chairperson of Muslimat NU because she thought that she had not enough ability to lead the provincial board. The chairperson of Syuriyah NU of Kandangan branch, a

¹⁵ According to Asmah Sjachruni, she shared this part of the house with her uncle who was the father of Syamsul Muarif (former Minister of Information during Megawati's government).

respected *ulama* (religious leader), gave her some advice and support “My daughter, please try. From somebody like you who knows her shortcomings and wants to learn, will make a good leader”. She consulted, then, her uncle, who fully supported her. After giving it some thought, she accepted the offer on condition that she should be instructed in religion, the constitution of NU, etc. and should have her first speeches prepared for her.

Asmah Sjachruni was a young woman (25 years old) when she held for the first time the chairperson of Muslimat NU of South Kalimantan. Many of her relatives and friends were apprehensive about her capacity to lead Muslimat NU. This anxiety became particularly great since, starting from 1954, NU had to prepare for the 1955 general elections. In order to fill her gaps as it was first appointment, Asmah Sjachruni took some part of every day after the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer to learn about how to deliver speeches, how to manage an organisation, about NU, etc., and prepared for her by an NU member who worked at the local Department of Information.

Although her husband supported her activities in Muslimat, Asmah Sjachruni faced also many domestic problems. For instance, in order to form branches and to do campaigning work, she had to do, what her son described, *babat alas* (open the jungle) which sometimes took a week away from her home. She told that she had to bring her new born child with her to breastfeed while touring and to leave the older children at home with her husband. Even worse she had to support her baby while she was campaigning at the podium (see also Patria in Helmy & Ma'shum, 2002: 84).

During the 1955 elections Asmah Sjachruni stood as a candidate for the national parliament. She was listed on the voting papers as the third candidate for South Kalimantan from the NU Party even though she had been proposed as the second candidate for her province. This change caused a protest from her to Zainul Arifin, who was the first vice prime minister but personally unknown to her. Regarding this incident which showed how gender relations was negotiated she told,

“What’s the matter?” Zainul Arifin said to me. I said to myself “Hmm, this is the man”. Then, I replied to him, “Nothing *Pak*, I just would like to talk with you. Could I?” “You could, especially if you are a beautiful woman,. I am pleased”. “No *Pak*. I am not joking. I would like to talk seriously”. He said then “Please take a seat”. “In South Kalimantan I have had but difficult struggle. I have worked tirelessly so that Muslimat NU could have a winning seat. But, how could my candidature suddenly become the third on the list? I just want to know”. What was the argument? “Well, PBNU has its own considerations, political and others,” he replied. I said, “And because you have the power?” “Well, yes maybe yes” he started to run around.

Finally she knew that the policy had been taken because the third candidate was a minister and NU would appreciate him by selecting him as the second. Although she was still unhappy with NU’s policy she gracefully accepted her third position. Fortunately, the NU Party got three out of the six seats and Asmah Sjachruni was elected.

When the NU Party merged with several other Islamic parties part, to form PPP (United Development Party) Asmah Sjachruni became one of leading figures within the party. She was the most vocal of all the speakers from PPP to reject the first government draft of the Marriage Law in 1973. When it was finally passed the Marriage Law of 1974 was a compromise between the government and the parliament particularly the PPP. From 1980 to 1982 she was elected the chairperson of Commission VIII, commission of parliament related to welfare. She ended her career as a member of parliament from PPP in 1987 after 32 years of long and productive service.

Ermalena Mhs

Ermalena was born on July 22, 1957 in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra. She graduated from the faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Pancasila Jakarta in 1984. Although she did not come from an NU family, she dedicated almost her entire career to this organisation. Her involvement in the organisation began in 1979,

when she was appointed as a vice secretary of Fatayat NU central board (Young Women of Nahdlatul Ulama). In 1984 she became the secretary general and in 1989 the first chairperson of this board. Since the general chairperson was absent for a study purpose, she was then the acting general chairperson.

While she was active in Fatayat NU, in 1982, she joined LKK NU, an institution within NU concerned with the Family Planning and Welfare program. She became a vice secretary of its central board in 1986. Since 1986 she has organised programs funded by international institutions such as UNICEF related to children's health. She was also involved in some of the joint programs between Muslimat and Fatayat NU concerned with women's economic empowerment such as the cooperatives program. Currently she is the director of IFPPD (Indonesian Forum of Parliamentarian on Population and Development) and a program manager of Primary Eye Care, Helen Keller International.

Ermalena said that her struggle within NU (because of her Sumatranese origin) was supported by Gus Dur. She said,

Since I am not a Javanese, I come from Sumatra, I entered NU and then became a central figure, there was a rumour...what for this Muhammadiyah entered (NU)... However, it was Gus Dur who supported me to develop my career [within NU]. It was *Pak Fahmi Saifuddin* who supported me much. They were all from the top position [of NU]. [They said]...Don't worry. Indeed I was successful until the end of my office.

Ermalena joined PPP in 1997 and elected as a Member of Parliament. As her main activities were concerned with women and health, she chose Commission VII related to issues such as health, women, and manpower. When she was asked about her decision to become involved in politics, she said,

Honestly, this (becoming an MP) was by accident. At that time PPP never won in Lampung, Sumatra. But I promised that I would work hard and I won...If we involve in politics, it will be effective for us [to defend women's issues], because 'power' is in our hand. We are powerless if we

remain outside. Now, the problem is how do we maximize our power. For this reason we should form a networking.

With regard to the support from the organisation for a political career she said,

The organisation did not prepare someone to be involved in politics. Khofifah became an MP because of herself. I became an MP because of myself. Everyone [from NU women] struggled for herself as shown by the *Bu Asmah* case. They became MPs without any support from the organisation.

She further said that NU should manage and support all its human resources because this will be beneficial for the nation. She noted that NU started recently to support its male members. “Even though it is limited to men, this is a good point. We have to support this”. However, it should be expanded to all autonomous bodies of NU, including affiliated women’s organisations, since they also carry the attribute of NU. She said, “We agree that NU is our parent organisation. Everyone will never say, “This is Fatayat”. They will always say, “This is Fatayat NU, NU women”. She went on to say,

We are different from the past. Compared to the past, Muslimat resources are more qualified. Now, they have facilities, they have money, they are smart. They are *lebih didenger lah* (more appreciated) by the society than before. NU should distribute all these resources in political parties.

Ida Fauziyah

Politics were not far from Ida Fauziyah’s family. Her father, H. Moch. Sya’roni, was four times a member of the district parliament from PPP (United Development Party) for Mojokerto, East Java. However, she chose a different party from her father’s party when she was selected and then elected in 1999 as a member of the national parliament. She argued that her decision to choose PKB (National Awakening Party) was motivated by the fact that PKB was founded and sponsored by members of NU. She felt comfortable with PKB and thought that

her aspirations were similar to the party's objectives. She added that her father died in 1998 before the foundation of PKB.

Ida Fauziyah was born on July 16, 1969 in Mojokerto, East Java and grew up within NU milieu. She went to a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Tambak Beras, Jombang and lived in for several years from the age of 12 years. She finished her secondary education (junior and senior high school) from a *madrasah* (religious school) in this *pesantren*. There she started to become involved in the organisation. She once held the chairperson of a female *santri* association. While she continued her study at IAIN (state institute for Islamic studies) in Surabaya, she joined IPPNU (Ikatan Putri-Putri Nahdlatul Ulama Association of young females of Nahdlatul Ulama) of Mojokerto and became its deputy chair. She continued to be an active member of the association when she finished her tertiary study and became a teacher in Jombang, Sidoarjo, and later on in Surabaya. Her involvement in this association brought her, in 1996, to be elected as the chairperson of IPPNU of East Java (see also Parlementaria, 2003; Panduan Parlemen Indonesia, 2001).

When PKB was founded in 1998 she joined the party which had turned to different organisations within NU for recruitment of its cadres. At first she was in the young bureau of PKB of East Java (provincial level). Then she moved to the women's wing when PKB formed PPKB (women's wing of PKB). In this wing she held the secretary of PPKB of East Java. For the 1999 elections she was selected as a candidate for the national parliament from PKB. According to her, her selection was based on the policy of PKB of East Java to include all segments including youth and women and she matched with these characteristics. Ida Fauziyah was finally elected in 1999 and at 30 years of age she was the youngest parliamentarian to take office for the 1999-2004 session (see also Parlementaria, 2003).

In the Parliament, Ida Fauziyah was involved actively in KPPI (Women Caucus of the Indonesian Parliament) which was formed on July 19, 2001. This caucus was set up across political parties and aimed at empowering female parliamentarians and developing a united front to defend women's interests. She

was one of five chairpersons who formed the presidium of this caucus serving from 2001 to 2004. Within her own party her career blossomed. She was secretary of the PKB fraction in the parliament between 1999 and 2004. She is currently the general chairperson of PPKB's national board (women's wing of PKB). In the 2004 elections, she was again selected and elected as a member of parliament for Daerah Pemilihan Jawa Timur VIII (East Java Elective Region VIII including Mojokerto).

As a female member of parliament she admitted that she had to face domestic problems. For instance, sometimes she had to attend meetings five to six times a day from early morning to late at night. She had even to attend "meetings outside the office for several days leaving her child and family at home". She went on to say that "(i)t was my choice, so, I have to enjoy it. If not it would be a very hard task for me" (Parlementaria, 2003). Fortunately, her husband, Taufiq R. Abdullah, is also an activist within NU and thus understands the busy schedule of his wife. Currently he is a deputy secretary of *Tanfidziyah* PBNU (executive body of NU's national board). However, sometimes their timetables clashed and their communication diminished. To solve the problem she tried to develop quality familial communication meaning not much but effective communication. For example, she always took daily prayer together in the morning (*salat subuh berjamaah*) to communicate with her husband.

Although she stated that she still preserved her *santri* tradition, she maintained that this tradition did not prevent from holding different views when attending meetings in the parliament. For instance, she always respected elder people. When she met them –some were *nyai* or female religious leaders and owners of *pesantren*– she kissed their hand. However, if she disagreed with them she would talk frankly and would defend her views (Parlementaria, 2003).

Khofifah Indar Parawansa

Khofifah Indar Parawansa was the first woman of Muslimat NU to become a minister. At 34, she was the youngest member of the Cabinet announced by

Megawati in 1999 during the Abdurrahman Wahid presidential period. She was born on May 19, 1965 in Surabaya, East Java. As she said, she was raised in a *kampung* (residential area often occupied by the middle-lower class) in Surabaya where people were religious. For instance, during religious festivities it was very hard to find people of her *kampung* wearing *pantaloan* (trousers) instead of sarong. Many of them read and wrote Arabic characters but not Latin characters. She herself attended two schools, a religious (*madrasah*) and a public one, a practice her parents adopted for all their five children.

While studying political sciences at the University of Airlangga (one of prestigious public universities in Indonesia), Khofifah Indar Parawansa joined organisations affiliated to NU. In 1986, she became at the same time a chairperson of IPPNU (association of young females of NU) at the district and a board member at provincial levels. Yet, she was also a chairperson of PMII (student union of NU) at the regional level. Her activities in organisations led Khofifah Indar Parawansa to be elected as the general chairperson of KOPRI (Korps PMII Putri or female section of the student union of NU) at national level between 1988 and 1991. Having finished her study, she became a member of the teaching staff of different tertiary private institutions in Surabaya, first at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah (1989-1990) then at Universitas Wijaya Putra (1991-1992).

Khofifah Indar Parawansa joined PPP (United Development Party) in 1990 and became a member of the research and development division of this party while she was still the general chairperson of KOPRI. As an activist with a background in the political sciences, she was often offered the position of a moderator of seminars on politics. Once, she moderated for a high party leader who was attracted to her quality. One day following the seminar, she was visited by the party leader while she was in discussion with her students and was offered a winning seat for the 1992 elections. At first she was surprised and after thinking about it and talking it through with her friends and husband she accepted the offer (Taju & Dewanto, 1997:171). During my interview she told her of consultation with her (former) teacher,

When I knew that I was offered a winning seat, I met *Ibu* Nur Zaenab, now a DPD (regional representative in the national assembly) candidate for East Java. She was 'my teacher'. I told her about my feelings that persons who will be a long time counted in the hereafter are parliamentarians. They are people's representatives but they do not struggle for the people. It was a very big burden. *Ibu* Nur Zaenab replied that the important thing is that I make an effort. "If you made an effort and you failed, you have got one reward", reward of *ijtihad* (reasoning). I thought this was the response to my doubts.

Khofifah Indar Parawansa was 27 years of age when she was elected a member of the national parliament for the first time in 1992. As a young parliamentarian with little political experience from PPP which was an opposition party she had to adapt to her new environment. "The process took about the first nine months in order to understand members' political stances and behaviour ... while proposing my perceptions", as she said. However, she still faced difficulties with regard to the political system which she thought was unequal and not transparent (Taju & Dewanto, 1997:172).

She told during the interview about difficulties faced by female politicians and especially an active politician like her. Once she was invited to visit some far of regions by male members while she was pregnant and close to deliver. "I was offered by men members to visit far regions. Yet, I was pregnant close to deliver. But, I enjoyed it. This was an *amanah* (trusteeship)". Leaving the family at home for several days was also a great problem. For instance, in 1998 soon after PKB (National Awakening Party) was founded her eldest daughter said to her "(M)om, you should dissolve the party, you go rarely back to home". Her other child's case, a boy presents another example. Recently, in addition to a gift presented directly to her on mother's day he sent her a letter by post saying "(N)ice Mother's Day. Mom, do not work too hard". However, she considered that problems related to the family's getting their backs-up fluctuated. Sometimes they supported her, sometimes they protested strongly.

Khofifah Indar Parawansa's career as a politician improved substantially when she moved from PPP to PKB. Abdurrahman Wahid was an important person behind her decision to move to PKB in 1998. However, at first she had to bear some heavy consequences by her move to PKB. She had to resign from her parliamentary office which still had a year to run. Relating to her move to PKB in 1998 she said,

I am someone who is a bit troublesome when facing senior, *kyai*. When *Pak Mathori* (the first general chairperson of PKB) invited me to join PKB, I replied to him how if I first finish my office since *Pak Hamzah* (PPP's general chairperson) asked me not to resign. Many other seniors gave me similar advice. But what happened? *Pak Mathori* called Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid) in my presence. I heard what they discussed. How could I refuse when Gus Dur asked me personally?

In the 1999 elections she was elected again for the membership of the national parliament. Further, she was appointed as a deputy to the speaker. Soon after Abdurrahman Wahid was elected by the National Assembly for the presidency in October 1999, she was recruited as Minister for Women's Affairs. This appointment was to everyone's surprise because this Ministry was long questioned as to its *raison d'être* by Khofifah Indar Parawansa herself. However, she accepted without conditions. She demanded in return more authority for the Ministry; such that all regulations and laws concerning women come under the one roof and that was from her Ministry, she demanded also that BKKBN (National Family Planning Co-ordinating Board) be under her authority; and not to be forgotten, she proposed an 18 percent increase in the Ministry's budget (Bianpoen, 2000:301). In addition, she renewed the façade of her Ministry by changing its name to the State Ministry for the Empowerment of Women. Taking a similar step, organisations for "wives" changed their names from PKK standing for Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (Family Welfare Tutorship) to Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (Empowerment for Family Welfare) (Parawansa, 2001:76).

Although Khofifah Indar Parawansa held her Ministry for only two years, her ideas and actions made a big impact. For example, she proposed a quota of 30 per cent women in the top two echelons of the bureaucracy and in the legislature (Parawansa, 2001:76). The Ministry of the Empowerment for Women supported women's networking in politics which led to the establishment of caucuses for women parliamentarians in 2001. During her office, the Indonesian government signed and ratified in 1999 the Optional Protocol which was part of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (2001:76). This ratification led to the legislation against domestic violence by the parliament in September 2004.

While she was still in office as a Minister, Khofifah Indar Parawansa was elected as the general chairperson of the Muslimat NU national board in 2000. Here, her ideas to improve Muslimat's members' participation in politics were implemented. For example, she organised a program called Capacity Building which was run four times in 2003. This program was aimed at strengthening networks between Muslimat's members in the parliament as well as for future members of parliament who came from different political parties such as PPP, PKB and Golkar. In the interview she said that the need to increase members' knowledge and to develop their ability to work as a team were among the objectives of such program.

Khofifah Indar Parawansa was once again elected as a member of the House of Representatives for the period of 2004 – 2009. She was also entrusted to hold the head of commission VI. This was the second time a Muslimat member had become the head of commission since Asmah Sjachruni between 1980 and 1982 and the fourth time for a women to hold the office since the New Order era.

Lathifah Hasyim

Lathifah Hasyim was born in Surakarta, Central Java on October 10, 1938. She was one of the daughters of Machmudah Mawardi, a former general chairperson of Muslimat NU. Her grandfather was a founder of *pesantren* Al Masyhud, a

place where many female daughters of *kyai* have spent their time learning and who later became prominent members of the Muslimat NU board. She spent her childhood in Surakarta and had a lot of female friends from different areas. This was partly because her mother established a new school for young women, called, Madrasah Nahdlatul Muslimat in 1930. This school attracted daughters of *kyai* especially from East Java to study here, such as Umroh Mahfudzoh etc. Her father died when she was one year old, and her mother continued to be a widow until her death in 1987.

Since she was young, she followed her mother's activities in social organisation. After she married in 1965 to Moh. Hasyim Mochtadi, Lathifah joined Muslimat NU in 1968 as a second secretary. This period marked the beginning of her deep involvement in Muslimat NU. She was appointed as the first secretary of Muslimat NU in 1979 and afterwards became a chairperson of Muslimat NU.

Different from her mother and her brother, Lathifah was never interested in politics. Her brother, Cholid Mawardi was a former ambassador of Syria and also was a former MP, whereas Lathifah was largely concerned with social religious organisations. This can be seen from her performance. Lathifah is a prototype of a woman who was sincerely dedicated to her work for the benefit of Muslimat. She was a diligent woman. She spent her full day working at the Muslimat office. Thus she knew a lot about Muslimat activities. Although she knew Muslimat members who participated in politics, she never wanted to enter politics. She once said: "If everyone is busy with politics, who is going to responsible for the continuity of this organisation?" This comment at least indicates who really Lathifah is.

Ratu Dian Hatifah

Born in Jakarta, July 4, 1969, Ratu Dian Hatifah represents the progressive young woman of NU. Her father used to be active in Hizbul Wathan of Banten, an ex Muslim militia formed during the war. After Hizbul Wathan was dismissed, her

father joined the military. The name of Ratu indicates that she belongs to an aristocratic family of Banten. Ratu Dian graduated from the State Institute of Islamic Studies. During her student days at the university, Ratu Dian was invited by her friends to join the girls' organisation of NU.

Her first involvement in the NU organisation was occurred in 1988. She joined the IPPNU (female student's association of NU) at the regional level. She said: "I never joined any other NU organisation before, so did my father. I am genuine. What I know is that my family is NU".

Ratu Dian actively participated in organisations such as KNPI (Youth National Committee) and FKPP (forum of sons and daughters of retired armed services officers) since her father was a former member of the Indonesian army. Her national career began after she was entrusted as a secretary general of IPPNU board in 1996. A year later she married the secretary general of PMII, Rusdin M. Nur. From that moment, her career developed more than before. She joined the KNPI central board and she was also involved in a voter's education program which was funded by the UNDP. In 2000, she was elected as the general chairperson of the IPPNU central board. She joined Muslimat NU after she finished with IPPNU.

Her first involvement in politics began in the organisation. She said, "I learned politics firstly through the organisation. The organisation is a warming up before we enter politics". Then, after her duty in IPPNU finished, she joined PKB. She became a member of the women's section of PKB called PPKB (Women of National Awakening Party). She was interested in PKB because she was impressed by its leadership. She said, "At that time, *Gus Dur* (Abdurrahman Wahid) was my idol. He is smart and he always gives a welcome to anyone. He has a close relationship with the young generation. He has a lot of humour".

She learnt politics from her eldest brother, Tubagus Haryono. He was a former general chairperson of the KNPI central board and was also a former MP from Golkar. She said, "I saw my brother enjoy being a politician, even though he

had to walk step by step. Then I convinced myself, if my brother could do that, why could not I?”

However, her involvement in PKB did not last long. In 2003, she resigned from PKB and joined Golkar. For this reason, she said,

Actually I was really happy with that first party. In politics, anyone who is strong must be in power. In fact, I could not face it. This was the most incredible experience I ever had. My political intuition could not function well.

She further said that competition between women was sometimes quite difficult. She said,

My experience is that women politicians are more unkind. This is partly because women are reluctant to forgive and forget if there was a case. She tended to remember all the time. This is different with men. This is because a feeling of distrust arouses among women. They tend to use ‘feeling’. If only Indonesian women trusted each other, I am sure that they can be developed.

Ratu Dian is finally critical about women’s position within *kyai*’s cultural tradition in PKB, especially for her (i.e. non-Javanese and non-‘*santri*’). She said,

I think PKB is suitable for women. There are a lot of opportunities for women. However feudalism and primordialism still occur (in this party). There are a lot of cultural obstacles that cannot be penetrated by women. It does not mean that I could not penetrate, but it was because I did not understand *ewuh pakewuh* (tradition) in communication or the tradition surrounding the *kyai*. I am not from *pesantren*.

Sinta Nuriyah

Nuriyah was born in Jombang, East Java, in 1948. She married Abdurrahman Wahid in 1969 when she was 21 years of age. Nuriyah had a graduate degree from the State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN), Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta. She

first became involved in Muslimat NU activities in 1972. Nuriyah was known to be very enthusiastic about studying. An automobile accident in 1993 which left her in a wheelchair until now did not hamper her plans to continue her study. In 1995 she finished her Master's degree in Women's Studies at the University of Indonesia. Her thesis focused on "Early Marriage and Reproductive Health" (Tempo Magazine, 2001).

Nuriyah's involvement in women's rights activities dated long before her husband became the president. She involved, for instance, in the forum Hear Women Speak advocating for victims of abuse in the May 1998 riots. Nuriyah's activities were appreciated by many institutions, for example, she received a special honor in Okinawa from the Japanese government for her efforts to help women victims of abuse (Bianpoen, 1999).

Nuriyah's other important work was her initiative to establish FK3 (Forum to Study *Kitab Kuning*). The FK3 aimed at reviewing and reinterpreting the teachings of classical texts. Her idea apparently came from research for her Master's degree. She said that her study opened her eyes to the discriminative treatment received by women from both the society and the religion. Once she told me that her supervisor, Professor Saporinah Sadeli questioned her about the use of certain *kitab kuning* in *pesantren*. She said, "My supervisor asked me what is *Uqudulujjayn*? I answered, "This is an important *kitab* about women taught in *pesantren*". My supervisor said, "I think it is very interesting that you make a research about this *kitab*". In an interview conducted by Bianpoen (1999) she said, "Women are seen as occupying a position even lower than that of the lowest of slaves". Nuriyah's involvement in seeking reform of the classical teachings is important because most of these *kitab kuning* are degrading to women. In this regard, she also chairs two hundred '*pesantren putri*' (religious boarding schools for Muslim girls) under the banner of PUAN Amal Hayati.

Umroh Machfudzoh

Umroh was born in Gresik, East Java, on February 4, 1936. “Within the *pesantren* circle in Java, Umroh, indeed, is a well known figure”, Taju and Dewanto (1997:481) started their introduction about Umroh Machfudzoh. They went on to argue that people knew her because she was a descendant of influential religious leaders within NU. Her grandfather was K.H.A. Wahab Hasbullah who was the most significant traditionalist Islamic leader in Indonesia in the 20th century (Fealy, 1996:41) and a principal founder of NU. Umroh Machfudzoh was the eldest daughter of K.H. Wahib Wahab who was the Minister of Religious Affairs from 1959 to 1962. Growing up within this circle of politicians, politics for her was a daily conversation. “Patriotic and heroic values were part of her life that were always taught in her family” (Taju & Dewanto, 1997:481). It was not strange that 15 years old Umroh Machfudzoh had already a dream to become herself a politician.

Umroh Machfudzoh has several qualities. She can read and understand *kitab kuning*. Her first primary school was in Gresik at a *madrasah banat* (religious school for girls). She moved then to Surabaya because of the war. She finished her primary school from a *madrasah* organised by NU in 1949. During the holidays she often spent her time in Jombang where she had learnt *kitab kuning* in the *pesantren* of her grandfather. In 1950, she continued her study at a school established by a former general chairperson of Muslimat NU, Mahmudah Mawardi, in Surakarta, Central Java. She lived in a *pesantren* directed by K.H. Mashud, the father of Mahmudah Mawardi. According to Umroh, she was the first daughter of a Jombang *kyai* who was sent to study in Surakarta. She further said, “After I continued my study in Surakarta, many Jombang *kyais* sent their daughters to Surakarta”.

Umroh also has the oratory skill. When she was in Surakarta she was often invited by Muslimat branches in Central Java to preach in a *pengajian akbar* (mass religious meeting). She went to Semarang, Kendal, Batang, Salatiga, Pekalongan. She said,

Everytime I preached in a *pengajian* I had been given gifts by many women such as *batik halus* (fine batik cloth), *kerudung* (veil), and so forth. I sent some of those presents to my mother. I gave some of them to my friends. Therefore, my friends liked me if I was invited outside.

Umroh was one of the founders of IPPNU (Association of female student of NU). She became the first chairperson of IPPNU in 1955. It was through her activities in IPPNU that later she knew her future husband. Tolchah Mansur, who was a former chairperson of IPNU, proposed marriage to her in 1958. With his support Umroh finally got involved in real politics.

Umroh began her political involvement when she was 18 years of age, after NU became a political party. Umroh was approached by NU to participate as a campaigner. She campaigned mainly in Central Java. According to her, the experience of campaign was exciting. She told,

Once I went to Salatiga. I was invited by *Nyai Zuhri*, a leader of a Muslimat NU branch, to campaign. It was in a mountainous area with difficult transportation. Then the Ansor branch invited me to ride a horse. I went to that place by riding a horse. When I had reached the place, someone told me that this place was actually a base of PKI. I was not afraid. What I wanted was to expose NU values. I made a poem about Allah's commands to the people. They had appreciated my campaign because of my speech and perhaps, because I was still a young woman, that later I heard they wanted to make their place a peaceful place during and after the general elections.

After she had finished her study in Surakarta she married and then moved to Yogyakarta. In 1967, she continued her study at IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, though she had already had six children. Umroh graduated from IAIN with *cumlaude* in 1973. She was then active in Muslimat NU Yogyakarta. In 1975 she was elected as the chairperson of Muslimat NU Yogyakarta for three periods. While she was the chairperson of Muslimat, Umroh joined PPP and she was appointed as a vice treasurer. She quit Muslimat in 1986 because she was offered the position of treasurer of PPP. Most of Muslimat members supported her

to accept PPP's offer because they thought that she had the capability to be successful in politics. In the same year Umroh was selected as a candidate and then elected as a member of the provincial parliament.

There was an important event related to Umroh's relations with her male colleagues in the party. It happened when Attabik Ali was sacked by the central party board from his office as the chairperson of PPP of Yogyakarta. Attabik Ali was a son of K.H. Ali Ma'shum, a former *Rais Am* of Syuriah NU central board. The party board decision was apparently caused by the bad relations between Attabik and J. Naro, former chairperson of PPP central board. According to Umroh, Attabik used a plenary forum to denigrate Naro and his political maneuvering. Umroh further said that before Darussamin (vice chairperson of PPP Yogyakarta) told Attabik of the decision he came to her house to meet her and her husband. Darussamin informed her about the decision and asked her to replace Attabik. She said,

My husband then responded, "I am okay if she will be appointed to head the PPP provincial board. I will support her. But first thing, you have to ask the blessing of Kyai Ali [father of Attabik] and ask him whether he agree or disagree with my wife's appointment". When Darussamin informed Kyai Ali about the recalling of his son from his office and the leadership change of PPP Yogyakarta, Kyai Ali asked him, "Who's going to replace him?" Darussamin replied. "Because Attabik is from the NU circle so he must be replaced by another NU member. And Ibu Umroh will become the next chairperson". Kyai Ali exclaimed "*Alhamdulillah* (praise to Allah)" and expressed his agreement. I asked then other Muslim representatives within PPP whether they agreed with my appointment or disagreed. They expressed their agreement and I became then the acting chairperson.

Umroh was elected for the national parliament in 1987, a year after her husband passed away. She was reelected in 1992 for a second term. While she was an MP from PPP, in 1992, she was appointed to head the women's section of PPP which later became Wanita Persatuan (The Uniting Women). She was also invited to join Muslimat NU central board. She became a chairperson of Muslimat

NU from 1990 to 2000. In 1997, she intended to retire from her office as an MP. However, she returned to politics when PKB was founded in 1998. She joined PKB and became a member of Dewan Syura (Abdurrahman Wahid is the head of this council). Umroh was the only woman in Dewan Syura. In 1999, she was reelected for her third term representing PKB of Banyuwangi. In 2004, Umroh retired from her office and returned to Yogyakarta. She continued her husband's *amanah* (will) to develop her *pesantren* As Sunni Daarussalaam.

Zunatul Mafruchah

Zunatul was born on April 27, 1965. She was a daughter of Umroh Machfudzoh, a former chairperson of Muslimat NU. Although she was a descendant of a founder of NU, she never studied in *pesantren*. From her childhood, she studied in public schools. After she had graduated from the law faculty of the University of Islam Indonesia she became a lecturer at the University of Widya Wiwaha in Yogyakarta.

Zunatul Mafruchah joined several autonomous bodies of NU. First, she was involved in Fatayat NU at the regional level. In 1990, she was appointed a member of the IPPNU central board following her mother's election as a member of the national parliament. In 1995, she was appointed as a Muslimat NU central board member in the department of economy and cooperatives.

Her first political career began in 1995, when she became a member of PPP of Jakarta province. Two years later, she was asked by board members of PPP to return to Yogyakarta and participate in PPP of Sleman, Yogyakarta (district level). In the 1997 general elections, she was elected as a member of the district parliament for Sleman. After the formation of PKB she moved to this political party. According to her, she was asked by NU men and women at the provincial level to join the party. She further said,

I agreed to move because I am a *nahdliyin*. It is of my obligation to support the political party formed by NU. The fact that so far, NU had been co-opted by the other elements of PPP added to my conviction to

join PKB. Anyway, at that time, many NU MPs (within PPP) were reluctant to join PKB since they doubted PKB's future.

She resigned from PPP as well as her office as an MP in 1999. She claimed that her decision to join PKB impacted on PPP constituents. "After I joined PKB, many people particularly from the lower class followed my decision. They also moved to PKB". In the 1999 general elections she succeeded to be elected as an MP for Yogyakarta province from PKB. In 2002, she married Agus Sunarto, her colleague at the provincial parliament but from a different political affiliation, IPKI (League of Upholders of Indonesian Independence).

While she was an MP for Yogyakarta, the PKB central board held a special congress in Yogyakarta in 2002. She was then appointed as a vice secretary of the PKB central board. This appointment raised resentment among her PKB colleagues at the provincial level. In 2003, hundreds of PKB members rallied in front of DPRD Yogyakarta. They wanted Zunatul to resign from her office because she became a member of the PKB central board. They claimed that she disregarded the decision of PKB provincial board to resign. She was also accused of telling a lie to the public (*kebohongan publik*) (Bernas, 2003). They further claimed that her presence in the parliament had not been effective.

She was pregnant (4 month) when she faced the protesters' accusations. She confronted all the protesters arguing that she had never signed any official letter regarding her position as an MP. She said that she had not told any lie to the public. In addition, her service in the House of Representatives, in contrast to the accusation, was very effective. She was supported by a lot of her constituents (NU men and women) from her district. She refused to resign from her office, but if she must do so she insisted on the condition that she had to be replaced by another woman. Since there were no evidence at all to bear out those claims, the case of Zunatul ended. She continued to hold her office until 2004. According to Zunatul, there was a male conspiracy to sack her (interview).

With regard to gender relations between NU and Muslimat she said,

NU still holds the Islamic values (traditional Islam). It respects women, especially women who have brains. NU will appreciate Muslimat members who are able to discuss problems in a balanced way, for example, in politics they must know the intrigues. Women must understand or even give some solutions... They also have to be strong. I mean that sometimes the party holds a meeting until midnight or even until early morning. Women have to accept that without any hesitation.

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Interviews

The interviews were conducted in Jakarta Mid February 2004 - Mid March 2004. I followed up the interviews with some respondents by phone in December 2004. All interviews were recorder and trnasferred to MP3 files.

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Asmah Sjcahruni

Ermalena Mhs

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